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THOMAS CARLYLE'S ESSAY

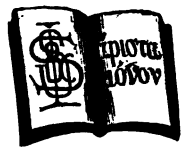
ON

ROBERT BURNS.

EDITED BY

W. K. WICKES, M.A. (AMHERST),

PRINCIPAL SYRACUSE HIGH SCHOOL.



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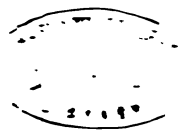

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PREFACE.

In reading this delightful monograph, it should constantly be kept in mind that Carlyle did not attempt, in any formal or biographical sense, to write a life of the poet, but simply used *The Life of Robert Burns*, by J. G. Lockhart (Edinburgh, 1828), as a convenient text about which to group many sentences of shining rhetoric, keen criticism, and, best of all, a great deal of noble and inspiring sentiment. Indeed, the monograph, first printed in the *Edinburgh Review*, No. 96 (1828), had as its title only that grand monosyllable which for more than a century has thrilled the hearts of the lovers of lyric poetry, — Burns.

Therefore, let no student come to the reading of this little book with the purpose merely of finding certain facts in the life of the poet; for while the facts are there, they are incidental and subsidiary to the revelation of the mind and soul of the poet. To know the mind and soul of the poet, — that should be the aim of the student. Reading thus, Carlyle will be found to be the *revealer* of

> "The light that never was, on sea or land;
> The consecration and the Poet's dream."

And surely that should redeem the reader from slavery to a mere literary task, — a compelled service performed in slave-like fashion. It should, it must, suffuse his heart with the glow of sympathy. In such a frame, he will find Carlyle to be an *inspirer*, breathing into his soul many a sweet and pure suggestion, many a strong and purposeful sentiment; so helping him, as high literature ever should, to make his own life and action more noble.

W. K. W.

NOVEMBER, 1896.

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THOMAS CARLYLE.

In seeking to trace the sources of a great man's power, it is easy to lay too much stress upon the influence of ANCESTRY. Not so, however, in the case of Thomas Carlyle; for had we no other testimony upon that point, his own would be complete and convincing. In his father, James Carlyle, were blended great natural mental aptitudes, clearness of judgment, strength of purpose, and an inflexible sense of duty. It was he, the son testifies, who was bent on "educating me; that from his small hard-earned funds sent me to school and college, and made me whatever I am or may become."

But not less potent, though in a different way, was the influence of his mother, Margaret Aitken, second wife of James Carlyle. In her was a fine mingling of native intelligence and emotional qualities; the latter serving to some extent to smooth away asperities, and even to introduce into the household certain homely amenities of life. Again the son testifies, at her death, in the wish that he may pass his days "with the simple bravery, veracity, and piety of her that is gone; that would be a right learning from her death, and a right honoring of her memory."

Of that good head-stock and heart-stock which was in James and Margaret Carlyle was born at Ecclefechan, Dum-

friesshire, Scotland, Dec. 4, 1795, Thomas Carlyle, the most original writer, certainly, of his time.

Carlyle, the lad, received the first lessons of his EDUCATION under the family roof-tree, his father teaching him to "count," his mother to read. Soon passing into the village school, he was pronounced by the schoolmaster "complete in English" at seven years of age. Thence he went to Annan Academy, there pursuing Latin, "less Greek," French, algebra, geometry. But the knowledge there gained did not satisfy the eager mind of the youth, — still less did it content the father, bent upon the completest education for his son which the schools of Scotland could furnish. And so the year 1809 found him in Edinburgh, a student of famous Edinburgh University. Reading between the lines which Carlyle himself has written concerning his college life, it is not difficult to believe that he pursued his studies with diligence, and yet with that independence and instinct of selection which mark the born student, more or less conscious of his innate powers. As a result of this "untaught ability" to discriminate, leading him to make a difference in the zeal with which he took up various subjects, the young Scotch student was not distinguished for his rank in college or the formal excellence of his scholarship. Yet beyond a doubt he received from his university training the very best thing which any university can bestow, — best stated by Carlyle himself, when, many years after his graduation, he returned as chosen rector of the university to deliver his rectorial address: The university, he declared, had taught him to read in various languages, in various sciences, so that he could go into the books which treated of these things, and gradually penetrate into any department he wanted to make himself master of. In other

words, it was a knowledge of books, and how to use them, that Carlyle chiefly valued — a sentiment finely consonant with that of his friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, pleading for the establishment in every college of a "professorship of books."

The LIFE of Carlyle, from young manhood on, was in a sense a quiet one, as well befitted a scholar and writer; yet it was by no means devoid of noteworthy incidents. We see him, soon after leaving the university, casting about, as many young men of genius before and since, to lay hold upon his life's calling. All thought of the minisitry, the cherished wish of his father's heart for him, he had, from motives of conscience, put aside; his resolution to study law was given up when he found he could not do it and at the same time earn a livelihood. Teaching, first at Annan, his old school, and afterwards as private tutor in Edinburgh, his university "toun," proved only a makeshift; and at length his lasting and right choice settled upon literature — upon book-making, in the high and noble sense of that word.

It was while he was still in search of his sphere of work that Carlyle met Jane Welsh of Haddington, a lady whose fine presence and rare qualities of mind deeply impressed him. They were married in 1825, and for many years thereafter, as Jane Welsh Carlyle, she held wide sway in the literary circles in which he was so marked a figure, while her constant sympathy with him in his literary struggles, her keen appreciation of his powers, and her unfeigned joy at his successes, cheered him and helped him to mastery. They lived at Edinburgh for a year and a half; and then many considerations of health and pocketbook induced Carlyle to remove to Craigenputtoch, a wild and lonely spot far removed from the homes and

haunts of his literary fellows. But Carlyle knew what he was doing, and clearly discerned that in that sequestered corner of the land he could best utter the thoughts surging within him. Here it was that he did much good work in the field of German literature and criticism, and here that he wrote that remarkable essay on Burns, — the text and theme of this little book.

Before his marriage Carlyle had been in London, and somewhat cheered at the prospect of literary employment and preferment. But dyspepsia, unrelenting enemy of his physical life, sad disturber of his mental and spiritual powers, made sharp attack upon him, and caused him to beat a retreat to Annandale, away from the noisy metropolis. It was the year 1834 before he again ventured upon London life; but this time it was to stay, and to make memorable as the home of "the Sage of Chelsea," old No. 5, now No. 24, Cheyne Row, — a house now come to be a veritable literary shrine. It was in this house at Chelsea that the greatest intellectual tasks of Carlyle's life were wrought; within and about this house that the shadow and sunshine of that life — more of the first than of the second — longest lingered.

Several of the seeming failures of Carlyle's life must be reckoned among his real successes, or at least among the literary world's good fortunes. For if he had obtained the professorship of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrew's University, a place eagerly sought for him by his friends; or been chosen as the man to found a normal school under the auspices of a National Educational Association, a scheme into which he made inquiry; or accepted a History Chair in his old university, as many undergraduates heartily wished him to do; or taken a seat in Parliament, as Froude once suggested to him,

— had any one of these duties fallen to his ot, it is quite probable that we would not have had the greater part of those books which have made the name of Thomas Carlyle, and his fame as a writer, so great and enduring.

Let us be glad, however, that Carlyle did accept several invitations to deliver courses of lectures. For while the lectures seemed hardly more than an "aside" in the drama of his life, a mere incident in his prolonged literary labors, yet they served to reveal to breathless audiences the rugged power, absolute sincerity, and intense passionateness of the man; best of all, they dealt with themes such as *German Literature*, *Heroes*, *Revolutions of Modern Europe*, *Heroes and Hero Worship*, — themes so welcome since to Carlylean students.

To the credit of Thomas Carlyle's life should be placed, also, the founding of a library in London. Trained to the use of books, keenly appreciating their value, roused by the lack of such books as he imperatively needed for his own researches, he set about the task of creating a library, and ceased not, aided by influential friends, till success was complete and a refreshing fountain was opened, still flowing in busy London.

Perhaps no event of Carlyle's literary life was so honorable to him, and rightly so enjoyable, as his installation as Rector of Edinburgh University. The office is purely an honorary one, imposing no duty except that of delivering a rectorial address. But it is an office that money cannot buy, nor rank and influence command. And it came to Carlyle as the practically unanimous voice of the student-body of the university, — the hearty recognition of his worth as writer and man. His immediate predecessor was Mr. Gladstone. Greater contrast in manner and matter of speech could not be! Yet Car-

lyle's address was as signal a triumph of God-given speech as had been that of "the grand old man."

But the gladness of triumph was soon changed to sorrow for Carlyle; for before he returned to London, his wife, — shaper and sharer of his fortunes, — who had been unable to accompany him to Edinburgh, died very suddenly. "Whatever triumph there may have been in that now so darkly overcast day," he cries, "was indeed *hers*." For our part, we purpose to let that statement stand as the deliberate and final estimate by Thomas Carlyle of the influence over, and worth to him of Jane Welsh Carlyle. Whoever wishes to read the record of domestic differences may find them written down in various places.

It only remains, in this brief sketch of some of the salient facts in Carlyle's life, to add that he bequeathed the estate of Craigenputtoch to Edinburgh University for bursaries. He died Feb. 5, 1881, and was buried in the old kirkyard at Ecclefechan.

Just here a few words concerning some of Carlyle's CONTEMPORARIES and CRITICS may not be amiss, in the effort to get a general estimate of the man as influenced by his surroundings. For while he seemed to be, and indeed was, singularly independent of others and of their criticisms, — at one time saying, "They have said, and they will say, and let them say," — and while he was himself a fierce critic of others, as many a sharp passage in his writings will attest, it is yet true that a few literary men of his time, and a few men of action as well, had a strong grip upon the mind of this strongly self-centred man. It was of Edward Irving, the famous preacher, who was a lifelong friend, that Carlyle wrote, "His was the freest, brotherliest, bravest human soul mine ever came in contact

with." With Jeffrey the critic, Carlyle had many a conversational tussle, — I know of no better word by which to describe it; and while the author was more than a match for the reviewer, Carlyle was undoubtedly influenced, if only to stronger belief in his own views. In John Sterling, younger than Carlyle, graduate of Cambridge, and a clergyman, he found a rare and congenial spirit, who understood the rugged Scotchman, and, in Old-English phrase, was understanded of him. John Stuart Mill, philosopher, was on friendly terms with Carlyle, and must have made impress, though faint, by his willingness to hear and accept new truth, upon a man too prone to see but one side of great questions and problems, — and that, of course, his own side. In praise of Sir Robert Peel, statesman, Carlyle was very enthusiastic, — *for him*, — and carried his regard so far as to dedicate to him his *Cromwell*. Of the Duke of Wellington, soldier, Carlyle speaks commending the expression of "nobleness there is about the old hero," adding, "Except for Dr. Chalmers, I have not for many years seen so beautiful an old man." So much out of the ordinary run of writers was John Ruskin, that Carlyle found much in him to commend, and, we may well believe, found an originality of expression quite equal, in its way, to his own. But the list of Carlyle's contemporaries is so long that we must stop with mention of but two more: Goethe, the great German writer, so different from the Scotch writer in the make-up of his mind and character, that one is lost in wonder at the tremendous sway he had over Carlyle; Ralph Waldo Emerson, our own great American, having such kinship of intellect and originality with the sturdy Scot, that we wonder not, but are lost in admiration at the fine communion for half a century of these two rare souls.

Of the critics of Thomas Carlyle in his own day and since, the name is legion. But among them all, one, James Anthony Froude, most conspicuously stands forth. This would naturally be so from the fact that Carlyle himself, in the most unreserved fashion, put into the hands of Froude a mass, literally, of letters, correspondence, documents, and the like, appertaining both to his wife and himself, with the sanction of his entire consent and wish that the historian make whatever use he saw fit of any and all of it, — to print it or to burn it. He printed; but thereby awoke a clash of controversy the echo of which has not yet wholly ceased to reverberate. A more generous critic, and perhaps quite as just, is Professor Masson, who had most excellent opportunities for study of the great Scotch writer, and has given us, in small compass, a delightful sketch of *Carlyle Personally, and in His Writings.* And quite recently in the *Famous Scots Series* appeared a life of Carlyle, suggestively written, by H. C. Macpherson.

But whatever certain of Carlyle's contemporaries and his critics, early and late, may have reiterated of blame or refrained to utter of due praise, not one that has not found admirable qualities in Carlyle as a MAN. They all tell us, and tell us truly, that his passion for truth, as he conceived it to be, was of such high sort that no allurement could entice him away from its steadfast pursuit, or cause him to use it for furtherance of any plan or scheme not worthy of the truth's own inherent holiness. We know that a rich baron proffered any sum Carlyle might name to secure his advocacy of a bill, and not an ignoble one, brought before Parliament. But the offer was declined, Carlyle choosing to herald the truth involved in the bill in his own time and way.

There was also in this man a fine, discriminating sense between certain outward honors which it was sought to bestow upon him, and the heartfelt tokens of his friends. A pension, together with the Grand Cross of the Bath, freely offered by Mr. Disraeli, premier, is declined; a gold medal, the loving gift of his Scotch countrymen, he is delighted to accept. This, it seems to me, clearly suggests that the applause of men, and that kind of fame which is only "notoriety turned gray," were of less account in his eyes, not so dear to his heart, as the appreciation of the home-folk. And this of a man who has been charged with coldness and cynicism! See, also, if the outcroppings of his sympathetic nature do not find clear denotement in the essay on Burns!

That Carlyle had grave infirmities is beyond question, — dyspepsia menacing his health; a "constitutional sadness" shadowing his thoughts; brusqueness of speech; distaste for "dinner popularity;" disregard for social amenities. But it is his own cry, "We make too much of faults." Let us who seek to judge his life avoid the mistake which he confesses! And let it serve to hide a multitude of Carlyle's own faults, that he was so impatient at all sham or pretence, so absolutely intolerant of all wrong, interpreting his famous dictum, "Might is right," as he ever did, with his pen and by his life: Righteousness is the mightiest force in the universe of God.

But in Thomas Carlyle, ancestry, education, companionships, the incidents of life, and even the qualities of the man as man, were mingled and fused to make the WRITER. Of writing books he says, "It is the one use of living for me." Right nobly did he fulfill his calling! For while he wrote much which the oft-changing fashion in letters has cast into the limbo of forgotten words, he also uttered many thoughts

which the world "will not willingly let die." Into that limbo of the forgotten have passed many of the abstractions and philosophizings of his earlier years and of his intense study of German literature and philosophy. Yet even when these proofs of the "mortality of literature" have disappeared, there still remains, in these very writings, a great deal of most worthy thought. Cast out also, if you will, much that Carlyle wrote upon the social problems of the day, — for you may find therein many confusions and contradictions; yet the gems of thought and sentiment remaining, even despite their incrustations of curious expressions, will well repay perusal, and incite the mind to serious thinking. Add now to this most excellent residuum of his philosophical and sociological writings the many wonderful delineations of character and characteristics of famous personages in history, and the sum total will be, a body of literature unmatched in modern English letters for its vigor of thought, originality of expression, deep insight into motives, subtle yet strong sympathy for the right, fiery denunciation of the wrong.

And now a brief examination of the three main kinds of Carlyle's writing — philosophical, sociological, and historical — may, I trust, confirm my statement, or at least send the thoughtful student to the works of the master himself, therein to seek, I trust to find his own confirming judgment.

In speaking of Carlyle's philosophical writings, we do not mean to intimate that he founded, or minutely copied, any system of philosophy. There was too much originality in him for the latter; too little of formal coherency in thought and expression for the former. But he had his theories, in part drawn from German metaphysics and mysticism, and

in part the results of his own independent thinking, all fused into a sort of unity by his rare power to recreate and combine. From the stern orthodoxy of his father he soon broke away, finding in it no safe pathway of transition from the natural to the supernatural, and proclaimed himself the child of "a new spiritual birth." It seems to have been Gibbon who caused him to break away from the traditions and beliefs of the Scotch Covenanters; and Goethe, who stood as godfather to the new-birth child. To the various philosophical theories of Carlyle the term "transcendentalism" has often been applied, — a word which as well describes those theories as any one word can. But, as it would not comport with the purpose of this brief sketch to enter into an analysis of a term so variously used and subject to such wide-apart interpretations, it must here suffice to mention several works of Carlyle in which outcroppings of philosophical thought are quite frequent. Thus, in the so-called *Miscellanies*, made up very largely of magazine articles, the reader is struck with the abstract and abstruse nature of much of the thought, as though the writer were resolved to mount "the brightest heaven of invention" upon the wings of his own reading and thinking. And in *Sartor Resartus*, in some respects foremost among his philosophical writings, he essayed another lofty flight; but so deftly mingled illustration, comment, imagery and appeal with abstractions and soliloquies, as to make the book memorable for all time, — in very truth, "the survival of the fittest" in literature.

But a man so deeply sympathetic by nature as was Thomas Carlyle could not spend all his best days and ripest powers in the service of the metaphysical, — even though illumined, as by him, with radiant thoughts on life. From

early manhood there kept ringing in his ears the cries of the poor and oppressed, and the vision of them was ever before his eyes. But hearing and seeing meant, with him, *to write*. And so came forth *Chartism*, a small volume, so earnestly — and effectively in an argumentative sense, — pleading the cause of the toilers in field, mine, and shop, that Conservative and Liberal alike took alarm, fearing lest the foundations of government might be overturned. In the same general path followed a book with the taking title, *Past and Present*. In many respects it was a strong and fascinating book, yet with a fatal "sin of omission," namely, the failure to point out any remedy for present ills save such as the past had "tried and found wanting." And still again, with a persistency born of his nature and strengthened by his observation of the poor, he put forth the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, — a series of papers so trenchant, radical, and counter to the general trend of British civic life, that many men called it "madness," and gave him more credit for "method" in it all than rightly belonged to him. For it was just the lack of method that made Carlyle's fierce logomachies so bloodless. In other words, there was great outcry against the grinding ills of life, but only faint whispers of a way of release or relief; in short, he was sympathetic, not systematic. But such was the nature of the man, squaring exactly with his own theory, that the heart is more potent than the head; and so it is — sometimes.

But neither in philosophy nor in social science is Carlyle at his best as a writer. His dramatic instinct and delineative power, coupled with his stoutly-held theory that great men make up the history of the world, all combined to render his historical works the most shining marks of his genius. Here the great artist — great despite his mannerisms and short-

comings — pictures scene after scene in his mind, and reproduces them upon the pages of his books in "thoughts that breathe and words that burn." He is the Turner of literary color! Of no book is this so true as of the *French Revolution.* Therein are piled great masses and moving shapes of color, rising as if out of the seething sea of that red Revolution, and flaming against the dark background of the French people and life of that stormy period. Nor let it be said that this is not history — that history is not thus written. For while it may be conceded that the cause and cure of revolution are not traced with calm and judicial analysis, the *moral* of the dreadful story is made so plain that "he who runs may read," and, best of all, cannot but remember. And even dramatic history remembered is better than dry history forgotten.

With so much that was Puritanic in the character both of the Scotch writer and the great leader of the Commonwealth, it seems strange that Carlyle did not get more quickly and enthusiastically into the heart of his *Cromwell,* — a book, the writing of which caused him a great deal of worriment. It proved to be a successful work, however, and put the grim warrior upon a high pedestal of renown in the eyes of many men of republican tendencies, — and enhanced the fame, also, of Thomas Carlyle as a dramatic historian.

Perhaps, however, the loudest acclaim that greeted the ears of Carlyle was heard upon the completion of his life of *Frederick* the Great. That voice of well-deserved praise soon passed beyond the confines of the British Isle, and was re-echoed from the German Fatherland. For Carlyle's *Frederick* was at once recognized as a masterpiece, — a work of genius, into which had gone the research and toil of many years. It completely met Carlyle's own thought of genius as the capacity

for infinite work. It stamped him, also, as "a bright and shining light" among writers, — and he still illumines the great World of Letters!

FINALLY: In a time of discouragement, Carlyle once announced his intention to withdraw to the "Transatlantic Wilderness." We can but wonder what he would have found in us of America, or we in him! Or had he later yielded to the voice of Emerson tempting him to a lecture course in this country, what would have been our impressions! But he did not come. In lieu of that, and better than that, we may learn much of the man (and his opinion of many other men) from his own *Reminiscences*. Macpherson tells us that Carlyle "creates the standard by which he is judged," — a remark both paradoxical and true. But many of Carlyle's own countrymen, especially those who could not brook any departure from orthodox conventionalities of thought and expression, would not accept such a standard. So the critic-conflict raged. Other critics have attacked Carlyle's English. Now let it be confessed at once that many of his sentences will not "parse," nor square by the rules of his distinguished countrymen, Lindley Murray and Peter Bullions. But let not the reader be overmuch disturbed at that, but rather enjoy to the full his lightning-like exclamations, his wonderful delineations and word-picturings, his wide-compassing vocabulary; in short, the elemental power of his diction. (Perhaps, indeed," it is true of his English that he "creates the standard" etc.).

Moreover, Carlyle's thought was borne upward and onward on two wings, which, even-poised, will carry a writer higher and farther than any others, — Humor and Pathos. The first has often been denied to him, but not truly. It led him

to say of Sir Robert Peel, that it was that great statesman's sense of "fun" that he liked best of all in him; and it often appears, grimly to be sure, in his writings. As for the sense of true pathos, in Carlyle it is almost unmatched. To prove it by quoting would detain us too long; but the student may find ample proof in the essay on Burns, at this very minute in his hands. Add, now, that keen sense of the right which was in Carlyle, — a point to which we have before this alluded, the dominant note, indeed, of his works, — and surely it must be confessed that few men have greater claim to the thoughtful attention of the student of noble literature than Thomas Carlyle.

ESSAY ON BURNS.[1]

In the modern arrangements of society, it is no uncommon thing that a man of genius must, like Butler, "ask for bread and receive a stone;" for, in spite of our grand maxim of supply and demand, it is by no means the highest excellence that men are most forward to recognize. The inventor of a spinning-jenny is pretty sure of his reward in his own day; but the writer of a true poem, like the apostle of a true religion, is nearly as sure of the contrary. We do not know whether it is not an aggravation of the injustice, that there is generally a posthumous retribution. Robert Burns, in the course of nature, might yet have been living; but his short life was spent in toil and penury; and he died, in the prime of his manhood, miserable and neglected; and yet already a brave mausoleum shines over his dust, and more than one splendid monument has been reared in other places to his fame: the street where he languished in poverty is called by his name; the highest personages in our literature have been proud to appear as his commentators and admirers, and here

[1] Carlyle's review of "Lockhart's Life of Robert Burns."

is the *sixth* narrative of his *Life*, that has been given to the world!

Mr. Lockhart thinks it necessary to apologize for this new attempt on such a subject: but his readers, we believe, will readily acquit him; or, at worst, will censure only the performance of his task, not the choice of it. The character of Burns, indeed, is a theme that cannot easily become either trite or exhausted; and will probably gain rather than lose in its dimensions by the distance to which it is removed by Time. No man, it has been said, is a hero to his valet: and this is probably true; but the fault is at least as likely to be the valet's as the hero's: For it is certain, that to the vulgar eye few things are wonderful that are not distant. It is difficult for men to believe that the man, the mere man whom they see, nay, perhaps, painfully feel, toiling at their side through the poor jostlings of existence, can be made of finer clay than themselves. Suppose that some dining acquaintance of Sir Thomas Lucy's, and neighbor of John a Combe's, had snatched an hour or two from the preservation of his game, and written us a Life of Shakspeare! What dissertations should we not have had, — not on *Hamlet*, and *The Tempest*, but on the wool-trade and deer-stealing, and the libel and vagrant laws! and how the Poacher became a Player; and how Sir Thomas and Mr. John had Christian bowels, and did not push him to extremities! In like manner, we believe, with respect to Burns, that till the companions of his pilgrimage, the honorable Excise Commissioners,

and the Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt, and the Dumfries Aristocracy, and all the Squires and Earls, equally with the Ayr Writers, and the New and Old Light Clergy, whom he had to do with, shall have become invisible in the darkness of the Past, or visible only by light borrowed from *his* juxtaposition, it will be difficult to measure him by any true standard, or to estimate what he really was and did, in the eighteenth century, for his country and the world. It will be difficult, we say; but still a fair problem for literary historians; and repeated attempts will give us repeated approximations.

His former biographers have done something, no doubt, but by no means a great deal, to assist us. Dr. Currie and Mr. Walker, the principal of these writers, have both, we think, mistaken one essentially important thing: — Their own and the world's true relation to their author, and the style in which it became such men to think and to speak of such a man. Dr. Currie loved the poet truly; more perhaps than he avowed to his readers, or even to himself; yet he everywhere introduces him with a certain patronizing, apologetic air; as if the polite public might think it strange and half unwarrantable that he, a man of science, a scholar, and gentleman, should do such honor to a rustic. In all this, however, we readily admit that his fault was not want of love, but weakness of faith; and regret that the first and kindest of all our poet's biographers should not have seen farther, or believed more boldly what he

saw. Mr. Walker offends more deeply in the same kind: and both err alike in presenting us with a detached catalogue of his several supposed attributes, virtues, and vices, instead of a delineation of the resulting character as a living unity. This, however, is not painting a portrait; but gauging the length and breadth of the several features, and jotting down their dimensions in arithmetical ciphers. Nay, it is not so much as this: for we are yet to learn by what arts or instruments the mind *could* be so measured and gauged.

Mr. Lockhart, we are happy to say, has avoided both these errors. He uniformly treats Burns as the high and remarkable man the public voice has now pronounced him to be: and in delineating him, he has avoided the method of separate generalities, and rather sought for characteristic incidents, habits, actions, sayings; in a word, for aspects which exhibit the whole man, as he looked and lived among his fellows. The book accordingly, with all its deficiencies, gives more insight, we think, into the true character of Burns, than any prior biography; though, being written on the very popular and condensed scheme of an article for *Constable's Miscellany*, it has less depth than we could have wished and expected from a writer of such power, and contains rather more, and more multifarious, quotations, than belong of right to an original production. Indeed, Mr. Lockhart's own writing is generally so good, so clear, direct, and nervous, that we seldom wish to see it making place for another man's. However,

the spirit of the work is throughout candid, tolerant, and anxiously conciliating; compliments and praises are liberally distributed, on all hands, to great and small; and, as Mr. Morris Birkbeck observes of the society in the backwoods of America, "the courtesies of polite life are never lost sight of for a moment." But there are better things than these in the volume; and we can safely testify, not only that it is easily and pleasantly read a first time, but may even be without difficulty read again.

Nevertheless, we are far from thinking that the problem of Burns's Biography has yet been adequately solved. We do not allude so much to deficiency of facts or documents, — though of these we are still every day receiving some fresh accession, — as to the limited and imperfect application of them to the great end of Biography. Our notions upon this subject may perhaps appear extravagant; but if an individual is really of consequence enough to have his life and character recorded for public remembrance, we have always been of opinion, that the public ought to be made acquainted with all the inward springs and relations of his character. How did the world and man's life, from his particular position, represent themselves to his mind? How did coexisting circumstances modify him from without? how did he modify these from within? With what endeavors and what efficacy rule over them? with what resistance and what suffering sink under them? In one word, what and how produced was the effect of society

on him? what and how produced was his effect on society? He who should answer these questions, in regard to any individual, would, as we believe, furnish a model of perfection in biography. Few individuals, indeed, can deserve such a study; and many *lives* will be written, and, for the gratification of innocent curiosity, ought to be written, and read, and forgotten, which are not in this sense *biographies*. But Burns, if we mistake not, is one of these few individuals; and such a study, at least with such a result, he has not yet obtained. Our own contributions to it, we are aware, can be but scanty and feeble; but we offer them with good-will, and trust they may meet with acceptance from those for whom they are intended.

Burns first came upon the world as a prodigy; and was, in that character, entertained by it, in the usual fashion, with loud, vague, tumultuous wonder, speedily subsiding into censure and neglect; till his early and most mournful death again awakened an enthusiasm for him, which, especially as there was now nothing to be done, and much to be spoken, has prolonged itself even to our own time. It is true, the "nine days" have long since elapsed; and the very continuance of this clamor proves that Burns was no vulgar wonder. Accordingly, even in sober judgments, where, as years passed by, he has come to rest more and more exclusively on his own intrinsic merits, and may now be well nigh shorn of that casual radiance, he appears not only as a true British poet, but as one of the most consider-

able British men of the eighteenth century. Let it not be objected that he did little: he did much, if we consider where and how. If the work performed was small, we must remember that he had his very materials to discover; for the metal he worked in lay hid under the desert, where no eye but his had guessed its existence; and we may almost say, that with his own hand he had to construct the tools for fashioning it. For he found himself in deepest obscurity, without help, without instruction, without model; or with models only of the meanest sort. An educated man stands, as it were, in the midst of a boundless arsenal and magazine, filled with all the weapons and engines which man's skill has been able to devise from the earliest time; and he works, accordingly, with a strength borrowed from all past ages. How different is *his* state who stands on the outside of that storehouse, and feels that its gates must be stormed, or remain for ever shut against him? His means are the commonest and rudest; the mere work done is no measure of his strength. A dwarf behind his steam engine may remove mountains; but no dwarf will hew them down with the pick-axe; and he must be a Titan that hurls them abroad with his arms.

It is in this last shape that Burns presents himself. Born in an age the most prosaic Britain had yet seen, and in a condition the most disadvantageous, where his mind, if it accomplished aught, must accomplish it under the pressure of continual bodily toil, nay, of penury and desponding apprehension of the worst evils, and with

no furtherance but such knowledge as dwells in a poor man's hut, and the rhymes of a Fergusson or Ramsay for his standard of beauty, he sinks not under all these impediments. Through the fogs and darkness of that obscure region, his eagle eye discerns the true relations of the world and human life; he grows into intellectual strength, and trains himself into intellectual expertness. Impelled by the irrepressible movement of his inward spirit, he struggles forward into the general view, and with haughty modesty lays down before us, as the fruit of his labor, a gift, which Time has now pronounced imperishable. Add to all this, that his darksome, drudging childhood and youth was by far the kindliest era of his whole life; and that he died in his thirty-seventh year; and then ask if it be strange that his poems are imperfect, and of small extent, or that his genius attained no mastery in its art? Alas, his Sun shone as through a tropical tornado; and the pale Shadow of Death eclipsed it at noon! Shrouded in such baleful vapors, the genius of Burns was never seen in clear azure splendor, enlightening the world. But some beams from it did, by fits, pierce through; and it tinted those clouds with rainbow and orient colors into a glory and stern grandeur, which men silently gazed on with wonder and tears!

We are anxious not to exaggerate; for it is exposition rather than admiration that our readers require of us here; and yet to avoid some tendency to that side is no easy matter. We love Burns, and we pity him; and love and pity are prone to magnify. Criticism, it is

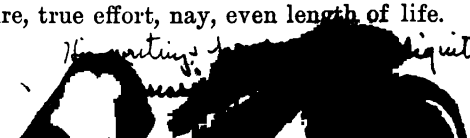
sometimes thought, should be a cold business; we are not sure of this; but, at all events, our concern with Burns is not exclusively that of critics. True and genial as his poetry must appear, it is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us. He was often advised to write a tragedy: time and means were not lent him for this; but through life he enacted a tragedy, and one of the deepest. We question whether the world has since witnessed so utterly sad a scene; whether Napoleon himself, left to brawl with Sir Hudson Lowe, and perish on his rock, "amid the melancholy main," presented to the reflecting mind such a "spectacle of pity and fear," as did this intrinsically nobler, gentler, and perhaps greater soul, wasting itself away in a hopeless struggle with base entanglements, which coiled closer and closer round him, till only death opened him an outlet. Conquerors are a race with whom the world could well dispense; nor can the hard intellect, the unsympathizing loftiness, and high but selfish enthusiasm of such persons, inspire us in general with any affection; at best it may excite amazement; and their fall, like that of a pyramid, will be beheld with a certain sadness and awe. But a true Poet, a man in whose heart resides some effluence of Wisdom, some tone of the "Eternal Melodies," is the most precious gift that can be bestowed on a generation: we see in him a freer, purer development of whatever is noblest in ourselves; his life is a rich lesson to us, and we mourn his death, as that of a benefactor who loved and taught us.

Such a gift had Nature in her bounty bestowed on us in Robert Burns; but with queen-like indifference she cast it from her hand, like a thing of no moment; and it was defaced and torn asunder, as an idle bauble, before we recognized it. To the ill-starred Burns was given the power of making man's life more venerable, but that of wisely guiding his own was not given. Destiny — for so in our ignorance we must speak, — his faults, the faults of others, proved too hard for him; and that spirit, which might have soared, could it but have walked, soon sank to the dust, its glorious faculties trodden under foot in the blossom, and died, we may almost say, without ever having lived. And so kind and warm a soul; so full of inborn riches, of love to all living and lifeless things! How his heart flows out in sympathy over universal nature; and in her bleakest provinces discerns a beauty and a meaning! The "Daisy" falls not unheeded under his ploughshare; nor the ruined nest of that "wee, cowering, timorous beastie," cast forth, after all its provident pains, to "thole the sleety dribble, and cranreuch cauld." The "hoar visage" of Winter delights him: he dwells with a sad and oft-returning fondness in these scenes of solemn desolation; but the voice of the tempest becomes an anthem to his ears; he loves to walk in the sounding woods, for "it raises his thoughts to *Him that walketh on the wings of the wind.*" A true Poet-soul, for it needs but to be struck, and the sound it yields will be music! But observe him chiefly as he mingles with

his brother men. What warm, all-comprehending, fellow-feeling, what trustful, boundless love, what generous exaggeration of the object loved! His rustic friend, his nut-brown maiden, are no longer mean and homely, but a hero and a queen, whom he prizes as the paragons of Earth. The rough scenes of Scottish life, not seen by him in any Arcadian illusion, but in the rude contradiction, in the smoke and soil of a too harsh reality, are still lovely to him: Poverty is indeed his companion, but Love also, and Courage; the simple feelings, the worth, the nobleness, that dwell under the straw roof, are dear and venerable to his heart; and thus over the lowest provinces of man's existence he pours the glory of his own soul; and they rise, in shadow and sunshine, softened and brightened into a beauty which other eyes discern not in the highest. He has a just self-consciousness, which too often degenerates into pride; yet it is a noble pride, for defence, not for offence, no cold, suspicious feeling, but a frank and social one. The peasant Poet bears himself, we might say, like a King in exile; he is cast among the low, and feels himself equal to the highest; yet he claims no rank, that none may be disputed to him. The forward he can repel, the supercilious he can subdue; pretensions of wealth or ancestry are of no avail with him; there is a fire in that dark eye, under which the "insolence of condescension" cannot thrive. In his abasement, in his extreme need, he forgets not for a moment the majesty of Poetry and Manhood. And yet, far as he feels him-

self above common men, he wanders not apart from them, but mixes warmly in their interests; nay, throws himself into their arms; and, as it were, entreats them to love him. It is moving to see how, in his darkest despondency, this proud being still seeks relief from friendship; unbosoms himself, often to the unworthy; and, amid tears, strains to his glowing heart a heart that knows only the name of friendship. And yet he was "quick to learn;" a man of keen vision, before whom common disguises afforded no concealment. His understanding saw through the hollowness even of accomplished deceivers; but there was a generous credulity in his Heart. And so did our Peasant show himself among us; "a soul like an Æolian harp, in whose strings the vulgar wind, as it passed through them, changed itself into articulate melody." And this was he for whom the world found no fitter business than quarrelling with smugglers and vintners, computing excise dues upon tallow, and gauging ale-barrels! In such toils was that mighty Spirit sorrowfully wasted: and a hundred years may pass on, before another such is given us to waste.

All that remains of Burns, the Writings he has left, seem to us, as we hinted above, no more than a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him; brief, broken glimpses of a genius that could never show itself complete; that wanted all things for completeness; culture, leisure, true effort, nay, even length of life. His poems



are, with scarcely any exception, mere occasional effusions, poured forth with little premeditation, expressing, by such means as offered, the passion, opinion, or humor of the hour. Never in one instance was it permitted him to grapple with any subject with the full collection of his strength, to fuse and mould it in the concentrated fire of his genius. To try by the strict rules of Art such imperfect fragments, would be at once unprofitable and unfair. Nevertheless, there is something in these poems, marred and defective as they are, which forbids the most fastidious student of poetry to pass them by. Some sort of enduring quality they must have; for, after fifty years of the wildest vicissitudes in poetic taste, they still continue to be read; nay, are read more and more eagerly, more and more extensively; and this not only by literary virtuosos, and that class upon whom transitory causes operate most strongly, but by all classes, down to the most hard, unlettered, and truly natural class, who read little, and especially no poetry, except because they find pleasure in it. The grounds of so singular and wide a popularity, which extends, in a literal sense, from the palace to the hut, and over all regions where the English tongue is spoken, are well worth inquiring into. After every just deduction, it seems to imply some rare excellence in these works. What is that excellence?

To answer this question will not lead us far. The excellence of Burns is, indeed, among the rarest, whether in poetry or prose; but, at the same time, it is plain and

easily recognized: his *Sincerity*, his indisputable air of Truth. Here are no fabulous woes or joys; no hollow fantastic sentimentalities; no wiredrawn refinings, either in thought or feeling: the passion that is traced before us has glowed in a living heart; the opinion he utters has risen in his own understanding, and been a light to his own steps. He does not write from hearsay, but from sight and experience; it is the scenes he has lived and labored amidst, that he describes: those scenes, rude and humble as they are, have kindled beautiful emotions in his soul, noble thoughts, and definite resolves; and he speaks forth what is in him, not from any outward call of vanity or interest, but because his heart is too full to be silent. He speaks it, too, with such melody and modulation as he can; "in homely rustic jingle;" but it is his own, and genuine. This is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them: let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself. Horace's rule, *Si vis me flere*, is applicable in a wider sense than the literal one. To every poet, to every writer, we might say: Be true, if you would be believed. Let a man but speak forth with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition, of his own heart; and other men, so strangely are we all knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him. In culture, in extent of view, we may stand above the speaker, or below him; but in either case, his words, if they are earnest and sincere, will find some response within us; for in spite of all

casual varieties in outward rank, or inward, as face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man.

This may appear a very simple principle, and one which Burns had little merit in discovering. True, the discovery is easy enough: but the practical appliance is not easy; is indeed the fundamental difficulty which all poets have to strive with, and which scarcely one in the hundred ever fairly surmounts. A head too dull to discriminate the true from the false; a heart too dull to love the one at all risks, and to hate the other in spite of all temptations, are alike fatal to a writer. With either, or, as more commonly happens, with both, of these deficiencies, combine a love of distinction, a wish to be original, which is seldom wanting, and we have Affectation, the bane of literature, as Cant, its elder brother, is of morals. How often does the one and the other front us, in poetry, as in life! Great poets themselves are not always free of this vice; nay, it is precisely on a certain sort and degree of greatness that it is most commonly ingrafted. A strong effort after excellence will sometimes solace itself with a mere shadow of success, and he who has much to unfold, will sometimes unfold it imperfectly. Byron, for instance, was no common man: yet if we examine his poetry with this view, we shall find it far enough from faultless. Generally speaking, we should say that it is not true. He refreshes us, not with the divine fountain, but too often with vulgar strong waters, stimulating indeed to the taste, but soon ending in dislike or even nausea. Are his Harolds and

Giaours, we would ask, real men, we mean, poetically consistent and conceivable men? Do not these characters, does not the character of their author, which more or less shines through them all, rather appear a thing put on for the occasion; no natural or possible mode of being, but something intended to look much grander than nature? Surely, all these stormful agonies, this volcanic heroism, superhuman contempt, and moody desperation, with so much scowling, and teeth-gnashing, and other sulphurous humors, is more like the brawling of a player in some paltry tragedy, which is to last three hours, than the bearing of a man in the business of life, which is to last threescore and ten years. To our minds, there is a taint of this sort, something which we should call theatrical, false and affected, in every one of these otherwise powerful pieces. Perhaps *Don Juan*, especially the latter parts of it, is the only thing approaching to a *sincere* work, he ever wrote; the only work where he showed himself, in any measure, as he was; and seemed so intent on his subject, as, for moments, to forget himself. Yet Byron hated this vice; we believe, heartily detested it: nay, he had declared formal war against it in words. So difficult is it even for the strongest to make this primary attainment, which might seem the simplest of all: *to read its own consciousness without mistakes*, without errors involuntary or wilful! We recollect no poet of Burns's susceptibility who comes before us from the first, and abides with us to the last, with such a total want of affectation. He is an honest man, and an honest writer.

In his successes and his failures, in his greatness and his littleness, he is ever clear, simple, true, and glitters with no lustre but his own. We reckon this to be a great virtue; to be, in fact, the root of most other virtues, literary as well as moral.

13 It is necessary, however, to mention, that it is to the poetry of Burns that we now allude; to those writings which he had time to meditate, and where no special reason existed to warp his critical feeling, or obstruct his endeavor to fulfil it. Certain of his Letters, and other fractions of prose composition, by no means deserve this praise. Here, doubtless, there is not the same natural truth of style; but on the contrary, something not only stiff, but strained and twisted; a certain high-flown, inflated tone; the stilting emphasis of which contrasts ill with the firmness and rugged simplicity of even his poorest verses. Thus no man, it would appear, is altogether unaffected. Does not Shakspeare himself sometimes premeditate the sheerest bombast! But even with regard to these Letters of Burns, it is but fair to state that he had two excuses. The first was his comparative deficiency in language. Burns, though for most part he writes with singular force, and even gracefulness, is not master of English prose, as he is of Scottish verse; not master of it, we mean, in proportion to the depth and vehemence of his matter. These Letters strike us as the effort of a man to express something which he has no organ fit for expressing. But a second and weightier excuse is to be found in the peculiarity of

Burns's social rank. His correspondents are often men whose relation to him he has never accurately ascertained; whom therefore he is either forearming himself against, or else unconsciously flattering, by adopting the style he thinks will please them. At all events, we should remember that these faults, even in his Letters, are not the rule, but the exception. Whenever he writes, as one would ever wish to do, to trusted friends and on real interests, his style becomes simple, vigorous, expressive, sometimes even beautiful. His Letters to Mrs. Dunlop are uniformly excellent.

But we return to his poetry. In addition to its sincerity, it has another peculiar merit, which indeed is but a mode, or perhaps a means, of the foregoing. It displays itself in his choice of subjects, or rather in his indifference as to subjects, and the power he has of making all subjects interesting. The ordinary poet, like the ordinary man, is for ever seeking, in external circumstances, the help which can be found only in himself. In what is familiar and near at hand, he discerns no form or comeliness; home is not poetical, but prosaic; it is in some past, distant, conventional world, that poetry resides for him; were he there and not here, were he thus and not so, it would be well with him. Hence our innumerable host of rose-colored novels and iron-mailed epics, with their locality not on the Earth, but somewhere nearer to the Moon. Hence our Virgins of the Sun, and our Knights of the Cross, malicious Saracens in turbans, and copper-colored Chiefs in wam-

pum, and so many other truculent figures from the heroic times or the heroic climates, who on all hands swarm in our poetry. Peace be with them! But yet, as a great moralist proposed preaching to the men of this century, so would we fain preach to the poets, "a sermon on the duty of staying at home." Let them be sure that heroic ages and heroic climates can do little for them. That form of life has attraction for us, less because it is better or nobler than our own, than simply because it is different; and even this attraction must be of the most transient sort. For will not our own age, one day, be an ancient one; and have as quaint a costume as the rest; not contrasted with the rest, therefore, but ranked along with them, in respect of quaintness? Does Homer interest us now, because he wrote of what passed out of his native Greece, and two centuries before he was born; or because he wrote of what passed in God's world, and in the heart of man, which is the same after thirty centuries? Let our poets look to this; is their feeling really finer, truer, and their vision deeper than that of other men? they have nothing to fear, even from the humblest object; is it not so?—they have nothing to hope, but an ephemeral favor, even from the highest.

The poet, we cannot but think, can never have far to seek for a subject; the elements of his art are in him, and around him on every hand; for him the Ideal world is not remote from the Actual, but under it and within it; nay, he is a poet, precisely because he can discern it

there. Wherever there is a sky above him, and a world around him, the poet is in his place; for here too is man's existence, with its infinite longings and small acquirings; its ever-thwarted, ever-renewed endeavors; its unspeakable aspirations, its fears and hopes that wander through Eternity: and all the mystery of brightness and of gloom that it was ever made of, in any age or climate, since man first began to live. Is there not the fifth act of a Tragedy, in every death-bed, though it were a peasant's and a bed of heath? And are wooings and weddings obsolete, that there can be Comedy no longer? Or are men suddenly grown wise, that Laughter must no longer shake his sides, but be cheated of his Farce? Man's life and nature is, as it was, and as it will ever be. But the poet must have an eye to read these things, and a heart to understand them; or they come and pass away before him in vain. He is a *vates*, a seer; a gift of vision has been given him. Has life no meanings for him, which another cannot equally decipher? then he is no poet, and Delphi itself will not make him one.

In this respect, Burns, though not perhaps absolutely a great poet, better manifests his capability, better proves the truth of his genius, than if he had, by his own strength, kept the whole Minerva Press going, to the end of his literary course. He shows himself at least a poet of Nature's own making; and Nature, after all, is still the grand agent in making poets. We often hear of this and the other external condition being

requisite for the existence of a poet. Sometimes it is a certain sort of training; he must have studied certain things, studied for instance "the elder dramatists," and so learned a poetic language; as if poetry lay in the tongue, not in the heart. At other times we are told, he must be bred in a certain rank, and must be on a confidential footing with the higher classes; because, above all other things, he must see the world. As to seeing the world, we apprehend this will cause him little difficulty, if he have but an eye to see it with. Without eyes, indeed, the task might be hard. But happily every poet is born *in* the world, and sees it, with or against his will, every day and every hour he lives. The mysterious workmanship of man's heart, the true light and the inscrutable darkness of man's destiny, reveal themselves not only in capital cities and crowded saloons, but in every hut and hamlet where men have their abode. Nay, do not the elements of all human virtues, and all human vices — the passions at once of a Borgia and of a Luther, lie written, in stronger or fainter lines, in the consciousness of every individual bosom, that has practised honest self-examination? Truly, this same world may be seen in Mossgiel and Tarbolton, if we look well, as clearly as it ever came to light in Crockford's, or the Tuileries itself.

But sometimes still harder requisitions are laid on the poor aspirant to poetry; for it is hinted that he should have *been born* two centuries ago; inasmuch as poetry, soon after that date, vanished from the earth, and

became no longer attainable by men! Such cobweb speculations have, now and then, overhung the field of literature; but they obstruct not the growth of any plant there: the Shakspeare or the Burns, unconsciously, and merely as he walks onward, silently brushes them away. Is not every genius an impossibility till he appear? Why do we call him new and original, if *we* saw where his marble was lying, and what fabric he could rear from it? It is not the material but the workman that is wanting. It is not the dark *place* that hinders, but the dim *eye*. A Scottish peasant's life was the meanest and rudest of all lives, till Burns became a poet in it, and a poet of it; found it a *man's* life, and therefore significant to men. A thousand battle-fields remain unsung; but the *Wounded Hare* has not perished without its memorial; a balm of mercy yet breathes on us from its dumb agonies, because a poet was there. Our *Halloween* had passed and repassed, in rude awe and laughter, since the era of the Druids; but no Theocritus, till Burns, discerned in it the materials of a Scottish Idyl: neither was the *Holy Fair* any *Council of Trent*, or Roman *Jubilee;* but nevertheless, *Superstition* and *Hypocrisy*, and *Fun* having been propitious to him, in this man's hand it became a poem, instinct with satire, and genuine comic life. Let but the true poet be given us, we repeat it, place him where and how you will, and true poetry will not be wanting.

Independently of the essential gift of poetic feeling, as we have now attempted to describe it, a certain

rugged sterling worth pervades whatever Burns has written: a virtue, as of green fields and mountain breezes, dwells in his poetry; it is redolent of natural life, and hardy, natural men. There is a decisive strength in him; and yet a sweet native gracefulness: he is tender, and he is vehement, yet without constraint or too visible effort; he melts the heart, or inflames it, with a power which seems habitual and familiar to him. We see in him the gentleness, the trembling pity of a woman, with the deep earnestness, the force and passionate ardor of a hero. Tears lie in him, and consuming fire; as lightning lurks in the drops of the summer cloud. He has a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling: the high and the low, the sad, the ludicrous, the joyful, are welcome in their turns to his "lightly-moved and all-conceiving spirit." And observe with what a prompt and eager force he grasps his subject, be it what it may! How he fixes, as it were, the full image of the matter in his eye; full and clear in every lineament; and catches the real type and essence of it, amid a thousand accidents and superficial circumstances, no one of which misleads him! Is it of reason — some truth to be discovered? No sophistry, no vain surface-logic detains him; quick, resolute, unerring, he pierces through into the marrow of the question, and speaks his verdict with an emphasis that cannot be forgotten. Is it of description — some visual object to be represented? No poet of any age or nation is more graphic than Burns: the characteristic features disclose

themselves to him at a glance; three lines from his hand, and we have a likeness. And, in that rough dialect, in that rude, often awkward metre, so clear, and definite a likeness! It seems a draughtsman working with a burnt stick; and yet the burin of a Retzsch is not more expressive or exact.

This clearness of sight we may call the foundation of all talent; for in fact, unless we *see* our object, how shall we know how to place or prize it, in our understanding, our imagination, our affections? Yet it is not in itself perhaps a very high excellence; but capable of being united indifferently with the strongest, or with ordinary powers. Homer surpasses all men in this quality: but strangely enough, at no great distance below him are Richardson and Defoe. It belongs, in truth, to what is called a lively mind: and gives no sure indication of the higher endowments that may exist along with it. In all the three cases we have mentioned, it is combined with great garrulity; their descriptions are detailed, ample, and lovingly exact; Homer's fire bursts through, from time to time, as if by accident; but Defoe and Richardson have no fire. Burns, again, is not more distinguished by the clearness than by the impetuous force of his conceptions. Of the strength, the piercing emphasis with which he thought, his emphasis of expression may give an humble but the readiest proof. Who ever uttered sharper sayings than his; words more memorable, now by their burning vehemence, now by their cool vigor and laconic pith? A single phrase depicts a whole sub-

ject, a whole scene. Our Scottish forefathers in the battle-field struggled forward, he says, "*red-wat-shod;*" giving, in this one word, a full vision of horror and carnage, perhaps too frightfully accurate for Art!

In fact, one of the leading features in the mind of Burns is this vigor of his strictly intellectual perceptions. A resolute force is ever visible in his judgments, as in his feelings and volitions. Professor Stewart says of him, with some surprise: "All the faculties of Burns's mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous; and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities." But this, if we mistake not, is at all times the very essence of a truly poetical endowment. Poetry, except in such cases as that of Keats, where the whole consists in extreme sensibility, and a certain vague pervading tunefulness of nature, is no separate faculty, no organ which can be superadded to the rest or disjoined from them; but rather the result of their general harmony and completion. The feelings, the gifts, that exist in the Poet, are those that exist, with more or less development, in every human soul: the imagination, which shudders at the Hell of Dante, is the same faculty, weaker in degree, which called that picture into being. How does the poet speak to all men, with power, but by being still more a

man than they? Shakspeare, it has been well observed, in the planning and completing of his tragedies, has shown an Understanding, were it nothing more, which might have governed states, or indited a *Novum Organum*. What Burns's force of understanding may have been, we have less means of judgment: for it dwelt among the humblest objects, never saw philosophy, and never rose, except for short intervals, into the region of great ideas. Nevertheless, sufficient indication remains for us in his works: we discern the brawny movement of a gigantic though untutored strength, and can understand how, in conversation, his quick, sure insight into men and things may, as much as aught else about him, have amazed the best thinkers of his time and country.

But, unless we mistake, the intellectual gift of Burns is fine as well as strong. The more delicate relation of things could not well have escaped his eye, for they were intimately present to his heart. The logic of the senate and the forum is indispensable, but not all-sufficient; nay, perhaps the highest Truth is that which will the most certainly elude it. For this logic works by words, and "the highest," it has been said, "cannot be expressed in words." We are not without tokens of an openness for this higher truth also, of a keen though uncultivated sense for it, having existed in Burns. Mr. Stewart, it will be remembered, "wonders," in the passage above quoted, that Burns had formed some distinct conception of the "doctrine of association." We rather

think that far subtiler things than the doctrine of association had from of old been familiar to him. Here for instance:

"We know nothing," thus writes he, "or next to nothing, of the structure of our souls, so we cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favorite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the fox-glove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of gray plover in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Æolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident; or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities: a God that made all things, man's immaterial and immortal nature, and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave."

Force and fineness of understanding are often spoken of as something different from general force and fineness of nature, as something partly independent of them. The necessities of language probably require this; but

in truth these qualities are not distinct and independent: except in special cases, and from special causes, they ever go together. A man of strong understanding is generally a man of strong character; neither is delicacy in the one kind often divided from delicacy in the other. No one, at all events, is ignorant that in the poetry of Burns, keenness of insight keeps pace with keenness of feeling; that his *light* is not more pervading than his *warmth*. He is a man of the most impassioned temper; with passions not strong only, but noble, and of the sort in which great virtues and great poems take their rise. It is reverence, it is Love towards all Nature that inspires him, that opens his eyes to its beauty, and makes heart and voice eloquent in its praise. There is a true old saying, that "love furthers knowledge:" but, above all, it is the living essence of that knowledge which makes poets; the first principle of its existence, increase, activity. Of Burns's fervid affection, his generous, all-embracing Love, we have spoken already, as of the grand distinction of his nature, seen equally in word and deed, in his Life and in his Writings. It were easy to multiply examples. Not man only, but all that environs man in the material and moral universe, is lovely in his sight: "the hoary hawthorn," the "troop of gray plover," the "solitary curlew," are all dear to him — all live in this Earth along with him, and to all he is knit as in mysterious brotherhood. How touching is it, for instance, that, amidst the gloom of personal misery, brooding over the wintry desolation without him

and within him, he thinks of the "ourie cattle" and "silly sheep," and their sufferings in the pitiless storm!

"I thought me on the ourie cattle,
Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle
O' wintry war;
Or thro' the drift, deep-lairing, sprattle,
Beneath a scaur.

Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,
That in the merry month o' spring
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Where wilt thou cow'r thy chittering wing,
And close thy ee?"

The tenant of the mean hut, with its "ragged roof and chinky wall," has a heart to pity even these! This is worth several homilies on Mercy; for it is the voice of Mercy herself. Burns, indeed, lives in sympathy; his soul rushes forth into all realms of being; nothing that has existence can be indifferent to him. The very devil he cannot hate with right orthodoxy!

"But fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben;
O wad ye tak a thought and men'!
Ye aiblins might,—I dinna ken,—
Still hae a stake;
I'm wae to think upo' yon den,
Even for your sake!"

He did not know, probably, that Sterne had been beforehand with him. "'He is the father of curses and lies,'

said Dr. Slop; 'and is cursed and damned already.' — 'I am sorry for it,' quoth my uncle Toby!" — "A poet without Love, were a physical and metaphysical impossibility."

Why should we speak of *Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled;* since all know it, from the king to the meanest of his subjects? This dithyrambic was composed on horseback; in riding in the middle of tempests, over the wildest Galloway moor, in company with a Mr. Syme, who, observing the poet's looks, forebore to speak, — judiciously enough, — for a man composing *Bruce's Address* might be unsafe to trifle with. Doubtless this stern hymn was singing itself, as he formed it, through the soul of Burns; but to the external ear, it should be sung with the throat of the whirlwind. So long as there is warm blood in the heart of a Scotchman or man, it will move in fierce thrills under this war-ode, the best, we believe, that was ever written by any pen.

Another wild, stormful song, that dwells in our ear and mind with a strange tenacity, is *Macpherson's Farewell.* Perhaps there is something in the tradition itself that co-operates. For was not this grim Celt, this shaggy Northland Cacus, that "lived a life of sturt and strife, and died by treacherie," was not he too one of the Nimrods and Napoleons of the earth, in the arena of his own remote misty glens, for want of a clearer and wider one? Nay, was there not a touch of grace given him? A fibre of love and softness, of poetry itself, must have lived in his savage heart; for he composed that air the

night before his execution; on the wings of that poor melody, his better soul would soar away above oblivion, pain, and all the ignominy and despair, which, like an avalanche, was hurling him to the abyss! Here, also, as at Thebes, and in Pelops' line, was material Fate matched against man's Free-will; matched in bitterest though obscure duel; and the ethereal soul sunk not, even in its blindness, without a cry which has survived it. But who, except Burns, could have given words to such a soul — words that we never listen to without a strange half-barbarous, half-poetic fellow-feeling?

> "Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
> Sae dauntingly gaed he;
> He play'd a spring, and danced it round,
> Below the gallows tree."

29 Under a lighter and thinner disguise, the same principle of Love, which we have recognized as the great characteristic of Burns, and of all true poets, occasionally manifests itself in the shape of Humor. Everywhere, indeed, in his sunny moods, a full buoyant flood of mirth rolls through the mind of Burns; he rises to the high, and stoops to the low, and is brother and playmate to all Nature. We speak not of his bold and often irresistible faculty of caricature; for this is Drollery rather than Humor: but a much tenderer sportfulness dwells in him; and comes forth, here and there, in evanescent and beautiful touches; as in his *Address to the Mouse*, or the *Farmer's Mare*, or in his *Elegy on Poor Mailie*,

which last may be reckoned his happiest effort of this kind. In these pieces, there are traits of a Humor as fine as that of Sterne; yet altogether different, original, peculiar, — the Humor of Burns.

Of the tenderness, the playful pathos, and many other kindred qualities of Burns's poetry, much more might be said; but now, with these poor outlines of a sketch, we must prepare to quit this part of our subject. To speak of his individual writings, adequately, and with any detail, would lead us far beyond our limits. As already hinted, we can look on but few of these pieces as, in strict critical language, deserving the name of Poems; they are rhymed eloquence, rhymed pathos, rhymed sense; yet seldom essentially melodious, aerial, poetical. *Tam O'Shanter* itself, which enjoys so high a favor, does not appear to us at all decisively, to come under this last category. It is not so much a poem, as a piece of sparkling rhetoric; the heart and body of the story still lies hard and dead. He has not gone back, much less carried us back, into that dark, earnest wondering age, when the tradition was believed, and when it took its rise; he does not attempt, by any new modelling of his supernatural ware, to strike anew that deep mysterious chord of human nature, which once responded to such things; and which lives in us too, and will for ever live, though silent, or vibrating with far other notes, and to far different issues. Our German readers will understand us, when we say, that he is not the Tieck but the Musäus of this tale. Externally it is all green and living; yet

look closer, it is no firm growth, but only ivy on a rock. The piece does not properly cohere; the strange chasm which yawns in our incredulous imaginations between the Ayr public-house and the gate of Tophet, is nowhere bridged over, nay, the idea of such a bridge is laughed at; and thus the Tragedy of the adventure becomes a mere drunken phantasmagoria, painted on ale-vapors, and the farce alone has any reality. We do not say that Burns should have made much more of this tradition; we rather think that, for strictly poetical purposes, not much *was* to be made of it. Neither are we blind to the deep, varied, genial power displayed in what he has actually accomplished: but we find far more "Shakspearian" qualities, as these of *Tam O'Shanter* have been fondly named, in many of his other pieces; nay, we incline to believe, that this latter might have been written, all but quite as well, by a man who, in place of genius, had only possessed talent.

31. Perhaps we may venture to say, that the most strictly poetical of all his "poems" is one, which does not appear in Currie's Edition; but has been often printed before and since, under the humble title of *The Jolly Beggars.* The subject truly is among the lowest in nature; but it only the more shows our poet's gift in raising it into the domain of Art. To our minds, this piece seems thoroughly compacted; melted together, refined; and poured forth in one flood of true *liquid* harmony. It is light, airy, and soft of movement; yet sharp and precise in its details; every face is a portrait: that *raucle carlin,*

that wee *Apollo*, that *Son of Mars*, are Scottish, yet ideal; the scene is at once a dream, and the very Ragcastle of "Poosie-Nansie." Farther, it seems in a considerable degree complete, a real self-supporting Whole, which is the highest merit in a poem. The blanket of the night is drawn asunder for a moment; in full, ruddy, and flaming light, these rough tatterdemalions are seen in their boisterous revel; for the strong pulse of Life vindicates its right to gladness even here; and when the curtain closes, we prolong the action without effort; the next day, as the last, our *Caird* and our *Ballad-monger* are singing and soldiering; their "brats and callets" are hawking, begging, cheating; and some other night, in new combinations, they will ring from Fate another hour of wassail and good cheer. It would be strange, doubtless, to call this the best of Burns's writings; we mean to say only, that it seems to us the most perfect of its kind, as a piece of poetical composition, strictly so called. In the *Beggar's Opera*, in the *Beggar's Bush*, as other critics have already remarked, there is nothing which, in real poetic vigor, equals this *Cantata;* nothing, as we think, which comes within many degrees of it.

But by far the most finished, complete, and truly inspired pieces of Burns are, without dispute, to be found among his *Songs*. It is here that, although through a small aperture, his light shines with the least obstruction; in its highest beauty, and pure sunny clearness. The reason may be, that Song is a brief and

simple species of composition: and requires nothing so much for its perfection as genuine poetic feeling, genuine music of heart. The Song has its rules equally with the Tragedy; rules which in most cases are poorly fulfilled, in many cases are not so much as felt. We might write a long essay on the Songs of Burns; which we reckon by far the best that Britain has yet produced; for, indeed, since the era of Queen Elizabeth, we know not that, by any other hand, aught truly worth attention has been accomplished in this department. True, we have songs enough "by persons of quality;" we have tawdry, hollow, wine-bred madrigals; many a rhymed "speech" in the flowing and watery vein of Ossorius the Portugal Bishop, rich in sonorous words, and, for moral, dashed perhaps with some tint of a sentimental sensuality; all which many persons cease not from endeavoring to sing: though for most part, we fear, the music is but from the throat outward, or at best from some region far enough short of the *Soul;* not in which, but in a certain inane Limbo of the Fancy, or even in some vaporous debatable land on the outside of the Nervous System, most of such madrigals and rhymed speeches seem to have originated. With the Songs of Burns we must not name these things. Independently of the clear, manly, heartfelt sentiment that ever pervades *his* poetry, his Songs are honest in another point of view: in form as well as in spirit. They do not *affect* to be set to music; but they actually and in themselves are music; they have received their life, and fashioned

themselves together, in the medium of Harmony, as Venus rose from the bosom of the sea. The story, the feeling, is not detailed, but suggested; not *said*, or spouted; in rhetorical completeness and coherence; but *sung*, in fitful gushes, in glowing hints, in fantastic breaks, in *warblings* not of the voice only, but of the whole mind. We consider this to be the essence of a song; and that no songs since the little careless catches, and, as it were, drops of song, which Shakspeare has here and there sprinkled over his plays, fulfil this condition in nearly the same degree as most of Burns's do. Such grace and truth of external movement, too, presupposes in general a corresponding force and truth of sentiment, and inward meaning. The Songs of Burns are not more perfect in the former quality than in the latter. With what tenderness he sings, yet with what vehemence and entireness! There is a piercing wail in his sorrow, the purest rapture in his joy: he burns with the sternest ire, or laughs with the loudest or slyest mirth; and yet he is sweet and soft, "sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet, and soft as their parting tear!" If we farther take into account the immense variety of his subjects; how, from the loud flowing revel in *Willie brew'd a peck o' Maut*, to the still, rapt enthusiasm of sadness for *Mary in Heaven;* from the glad kind greeting of *Auld Langsyne*, or the comic archness of *Duncan Gray*, to the fire-eyed fury of *Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled*, he has found a tone and words for every mood of man's heart, — it will seem a small praise if we rank

him as the first of all our song-writers; for we know not where to find one worthy of being second to him. It is on his Songs, as we believe, that Burns's chief influence as an author will ultimately be found to depend: nor, if our Fletcher's aphorism is true, shall we account this a small influence. "Let me make the songs of a people," said he, "and you shall make its laws." Surely, if ever any Poet might have equalled himself with Legislators, on this ground, it was Burns. His songs are already part of the mother tongue, not of Scotland only but of Britain, and of the millions that in all the ends of the earth speak a British language. In hut and hall, as the heart unfolds itself in the joy and woe of existence, the name, the voice of that joy and that woe, is the name and voice which Burns has given them. Strictly speaking, perhaps, no British man has so deeply affected the thoughts and feelings of so many men as this solitary and altogether private individual, with means apparently the humblest.

In another point of view, moreover, we incline to think that Burns's influence may have been considerable: we mean, as exerted specially on the Literature of his country, at least on the Literature of Scotland. Among the great changes which British, particularly Scottish literature, has undergone since that period, one of the greatest will be found to consist in its remarkable increase of nationality. Even the English writers, most popular in Burns's time, were little distinguished for their literary patriotism, in this its best sense. A certain attenuated

cosmopolitanism had, in good measure, taken place of the old insular home-feeling; literature was, as it were, without any local environment — was not nourished by the affections which spring from a native soil. Our Grays and Glovers seemed to write almost as if *in vacuo;* the thing written bears no mark of place; it is not written so much for Englishmen, as for men; or rather, which is the inevitable result of this, for certain Generalizations which philosophy termed men. Goldsmith is an exception; not so Johnson; the scene of his *Rambler* is little more English than that of his *Rasselas.* But if such was, in some degree, the case with England, it was, in the highest degree, the case with Scotland. It fact, our Scottish literature had, at that period, a very singular aspect; unexampled, so far as we know, except perhaps at Geneva, where the same state of matters appears still to continue. For a long period after Scotland became British, we had no literature: at the date when Addison and Steele were writing their *Spectators,* our good Thomas Boston was writing, with the noblest intent, but alike in defiance of grammar and philosophy, his *Fourfold State of Man.* Then came the schisms in our National Church, and the fiercer schisms in our Body Politic: Theologic ink, and Jacobite blood, with gall enough in both cases, seemed to have blotted out the intellect of the country; however, it was only obscured, not obliterated. Lord Kames made nearly the first attempt, and a tolerably clumsy one, at writing English; and, ere long, Hume, Robertson, Smith, and a whole

host of followers, attracted hither the eyes of all Europe. And yet in this brilliant resuscitation of our "fervid genius," there was nothing truly Scottish, nothing indigenous; except, perhaps, the natural impetuosity of intellect, which we sometimes claim, and are sometimes upbraided with, as a characteristic of our nation. It is curious to remark that Scotland, so full of writers, had no Scottish culture, nor indeed any English; our culture was almost exclusively French. It was by studying Racine and Voltaire, Batteux and Boileau, that Kames had trained himself to be a critic and philosopher: it was the light of Montesquieu and Mably that guided Robertson in his political speculations: Quesnay's lamp that kindled the lamp of Adam Smith. Hume was too rich a man to borrow; and perhaps he reacted on the French more than he was acted on by them: but neither had he aught to do with Scotland; Edinburgh, equally with La Flèche, was but the lodging and laboratory, in which he not so much morally *lived*, as metaphysically *investigated*. Never, perhaps, was there a class of writers, so clear and well-ordered, yet so totally destitute, to all appearance, of any patriotic affection, nay, of any human affection whatever. The French wits of the period were as unpatriotic; but their general deficiency in moral principle, not to say their avowed sensuality and unbelief in all virtue, strictly so called, render this accountable enough. We hope there is a patriotism founded on something better than prejudice; that our country may be dear to us, without injury to our phi-

losophy; that in loving and justly prizing all other lands, we may prize justly, and yet love before all others, our own stern Motherland, and the venerable structure of social and moral Life, which Mind has through long ages been building up for us there. Surely there is nourishment for the better part of man's heart in all this: surely the roots, that have fixed themselves in the very core of man's being, may be so cultivated as to grow up not into briers, but into roses, in the field of his life! Our Scottish sages have no such propensities: the field of their life shows neither briers nor roses; but only a flat, continuous thrashing-floor for Logic, whereon all questions, from the "Doctrine of Rent," to the "Natural History of Religion," are thrashed and sifted with the same mechanical impartiality!

With Sir Walter Scott at the head of our literature, it cannot be denied that much of this evil is past, or rapidly passing away: our chief literary men, whatever other faults they may have, no longer live among us like a French Colony, or some knot of Propaganda Missionaries; but like natural-born subjects of the soil, partaking and sympathizing in all our attachments, humors, and habits. Our literature no longer grows in water, but in mould, and with the true racy virtues of the soil and climate. How much of this change may be due to Burns, or to any other individual, it might be difficult to estimate. Direct literary imitation of Burns was not to be looked for. But his example, in the fearless adoption of domestic subjects, could not but operate

from afar; and certainly in no heart did the love of country ever burn with a warmer glow than in that of Burns: "a tide of Scottish prejudice," as he modestly calls this deep and generous feeling, "had been poured along his veins; and he felt that it would boil there till the flood-gates shut in eternal rest." It seemed to him, as if *he* could do so little for his country, and yet would so gladly have done all. One small province stood open for him; that of Scottish song, and how eagerly he entered on it; how devotedly he labored there! In his most toilsome journeyings, this object never quits him; it is the little happy-valley of his careworn heart. In the gloom of his own affliction, he eagerly searches after some lonely brother of the muse, and rejoices to snatch one other name from the oblivion that was covering it! These were early feelings, and they abode with him to the end.

——— "a wish, (I mind its power,)
A wish, that to my latest hour
Will strongly heave my breast;
That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
Some useful plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang at least.
The rough bur Thistle spreading wide
  Amang the bearded bear,
I turn'd my weeding-clips aside,
  And spared the symbol dear."

But to leave the mere literary character of Burns, which has already detained us too long, we cannot but think that the Life he willed, and was fated to lead

among his fellow-men, is both more interesting and instructive than any of his written works. These Poems are but like little rhymed fragments scattered here and there in the grand unrhymed Romance of his earthly existence; and it is only when intercalated in this at their proper places, that they attain their full measure of significance. And this, too, alas, was but a fragment! The plan of a mighty edifice had been sketched; some columns, porticoes, firm masses of building, stand completed; the rest more or less clearly indicated; with many a far-stretching tendency, which only studious and friendly eyes can now trace towards the purposed termination. For the work is broken off in the middle, almost in the beginning; and rises among us, beautiful and sad, at once unfinished and a ruin! If charitable judgment was necessary in estimating his poems, and justice required that the aim and the manifest power to fulfil it must often be accepted for the fulfilment; much more is this the case in regard to his life, the sum and result of all his endeavors, where his difficulties came upon him not in detail only, but in mass; and so much has been left unaccomplished, nay, was mistaken, and altogether marred.

39. Properly speaking, there is but one era in the life of Burns, and that the earliest. We have not youth and manhood; but only youth: for, to the end, we discern no decisive change in the complexion of his character; in his thirty-seventh year, he is still, as it were, in youth. With all that resoluteness of judgment, that

penetrating insight, and singular maturity of intellectual power, exhibited in his writings, he never attains to any clearness regarding himself; to the last he never ascertains his peculiar aim, even with such distinctness as is common among ordinary men, and therefore never can pursue it with that singleness of will, which insures success and some contentment to such men. To the last, he wavers between two purposes: glorying in his talent, like a true poet, he yet cannot consent to make this his chief and sole glory, and to follow it as the one thing needful, through poverty or riches, through good or evil report. Another far meaner ambition still cleaves to him; he must dream and struggle about a certain "Rock of Independence;" which, natural and even admirable as it might be, was still but a warring with the world, on the comparatively insignificant ground of his being more or less completely supplied with money, than others; of his standing at a higher, or at a lower altitude in general estimation, than others. For the world still appears to him, as to the young, in borrowed colors; he expects from it what it cannot give to any man; seeks for contentment, not within himself, in action and wise effort, but from without, in the kindness of circumstances, in love, friendship, honor, pecuniary ease. He would be happy, not actively and in himself, but passively, and from some ideal cornucopia of Enjoyments, not earned by his own labor, but showered on him by the beneficence of Destiny. Thus, like a young man, he cannot steady himself for any

fixed or systematic pursuit, but swerves to and fro, between passionate hope, and remorseful disappointment: rushing onwards with a deep tempestuous force, he surmounts or breaks asunder many a barrier; travels, nay, advances far, but advancing only under uncertain guidance, is ever and anon turned from his path: and to the last, cannot reach the only true happiness of a man, that of clear, decided Activity in the sphere for which by nature and circumstances he has been fitted and appointed.

We do not say these things in dispraise of Burns: nay, perhaps, they but interest us the more in his favor. This blessing is not given soonest to the best; but rather, it is often the greatest minds that are latest in obtaining it; for where most is to be developed, most time may be required to develop it. A complex condition had been assigned him from without, as complex a condition from within: no "pre-established harmony" existed between the clay soil of Mossgiel and the empyrean soul of Robert Burns; it was not wonderful, therefore, that the adjustment between them should have been long postponed, and his arm long cumbered, and his sight confused, in so vast and discordant an economy, as he had been appointed steward over. Byron was, at his death, but a year younger than Burns; and through life, as it might have appeared, far more simply situated; yet in him, too, we can trace no such adjustment, no such moral manhood; but at best, and only a little before his end, the beginning of what seemed such.

By much the most striking incident in Burns's Life is his journey to Edinburgh; but perhaps a still more important one is his residence at Irvine, so early as in his twenty-third year. Hitherto his life had been poor and toilworn; but otherwise not ungenial, and, with all its distresses, by no means unhappy. In his parentage, deducting outward circumstances, he had every reason to reckon himself fortunate; his father was a man of thoughtful, intense, earnest character, as the best of our peasants are; valuing knowledge, possessing some, and, what is far better and rarer, open-minded for more; a man with a keen insight, and devout heart; reverent towards God, friendly therefore at once, and fearless towards all that God has made; in one word, though but a hard-handed peasant, a complete and fully unfolded *Man*. Such a father is seldom found in any rank in society; and was worth descending far in society to seek. Unfortunately, he was very poor; had he been even a little richer, almost ever so little, the whole might have issued far otherwise. Mighty events turn on a straw; the crossing of a brook decides the conquest of the world. Had this William Burns's small seven acres of nursery ground anywise prospered, the boy Robert had been sent to school; had struggled forward, as so many weaker men do, to some university; come forth not as a rustic wonder, but as a regular well-trained intellectual workman, and changed the whole course of British Literature, — for it lay in him to have done this! But the nursery did not prosper; poverty

sank his whole family below the help of even our cheap school-system: Burns remained a hard-worked plough-boy, and British literature took its own course. Nevertheless, even in this rugged scene, there is much to nourish him. If he drudges, it is with his brother, and for his father and mother, whom he loves, and would fain shield from want. Wisdom is not banished from their poor hearth, nor the balm of natural feeling: the solemn words, *Let us worship God*, are heard there from a "priest-like father;" if threatenings of unjust men throw mother and children into tears, these are tears not of grief only, but of holiest affection; every heart in that humble group feels itself the closer knit to every other; in their hard warfare they are there together, a "little band of brethren." Neither are such tears, and the deep beauty that dwells in them, their only portion. Light visits the hearts as it does the eyes of all living: there is a force, too, in this youth, that enables him to trample on misfortune; nay, to bind it under his feet to make him sport. For a bold, warm, buoyant humor of character has been given him; and so the thick-coming shapes of evil are welcomed with a gay, friendly irony, and in their closest pressure he bates no jot of heart or hope. Vague yearnings of ambition fail not, as he grows up; dreamy fancies hang like cloud-cities around him; the curtain of Existence is slowly rising, in many-colored splendor and gloom: and the auroral light of first love is gilding his horizon, and the music of song is on his path; and so he walks

——"in glory and in joy,
Behind his plough, upon the mountain side!"

We know, from the best evidence, that up to this date, Burns was happy; nay, that he was the gayest, brightest, most fantastic, fascinating being to be found in the world; more so even than he ever afterwards appeared. But now at this early age, he quits the paternal roof; goes forth into looser, louder, more exciting society; and becomes initiated in those dissipations, those vices, which a certain class of philosophers have asserted to be a natural preparative for entering on active life; a kind of mud-bath, in which the youth is, as it were, necessitated to steep, and, we suppose, cleanse himself, before the real toga of Manhood can be laid on him. We shall not dispute much with this class of philosophers; we hope they are mistaken; for Sin and Remorse so easily beset us at all stages of life, and are always such indifferent company, that it seems hard we should, at any stage, be forced and fated not only to meet, but to yield to them; and even serve for a term in their leprous armada. We hope it is not so. Clear we are, at all events, it cannot be the training one receives in this service, but only our determining to desert from it, that fits for true manly Action. We become men, not after we have been dissipated, and disappointed in the chase of false pleasure; but after we have ascertained, in any way, what impassable barriers hem us in through this life; how mad it is to hope for contentment to our infinite soul from the *gifts* of this

extremely finite world! that a man must be sufficient for himself; and that "for suffering and enduring there is no remedy but striving and doing." Manhood begins when we have in any way made truce with Necessity; begins, at all events, when we have surrendered to Necessity, as the most part only do; but begins joyfully and hopefully only when we have reconciled ourselves to Necessity; and thus, in reality, triumphed over it, and felt that in Necessity we are free. Surely, such lessons as this last, which, in one shape or other, is the grand lesson for every mortal man, are better learned from the lips of a devout mother, in the looks and actions of a devout father, while the heart is yet soft and pliant, than in collision with the sharp adamant of Fate, attracting us to shipwreck us when the heart is grown hard, and may be broken before it will become contrite! Had Burns continued to learn this, as he was already learning it, in his father's cottage, he would have learned it fully, which he never did, — and been saved many a lasting aberration, many a bitter hour and year of remorseful sorrow.

43. It seems to us another circumstance of fatal import in Burns's history, that at this time too he became involved in the religious quarrels of his district; that he was enlisted and feasted, as the fighting man of the New-Light Priesthood, in their highly unprofitable warfare. At the tables of these free-minded clergy, he learned much more than was needful for him. Such liberal ridicule of fanaticism awakened in his mind

scruples about Religion itself; and a whole world of Doubts, which it required quite another set of conjurers than these men to exorcise. We do not say that such an intellect as his could have escaped similar doubts, at some period of his history; or even that he could, at a later period, have come through them altogether victorious and unharmed: but it seems peculiarly unfortunate that this time, above all others, should have been fixed for the encounter. For now, with principles assailed by evil example from without, by "passions raging like demons" from within, he had little need of sceptical misgivings to whisper treason in the heat of the battle, or to cut off his retreat if he were already defeated. He loses his feeling of innocence; his mind is at variance with itself; the old divinity no longer presides there; but wild Desires and wild Repentance alternately oppress him. Ere long, too, he has committed himself before the world; his character for sobriety, dear to a Scottish peasant, as few corrupted worldlings can even conceive, is destroyed in the eyes of men; and his only refuge consists in trying to disbelieve his guiltiness, and is but a refuge of lies. The blackest desperation now gathers over him, broken only by the red lightnings of remorse. The whole fabric of his life is blasted asunder; for now not only his character, but his personal liberty, is to be lost; men and Fortune are leagued for his hurt; "hungry Ruin has him in the wind." He sees no escape but the saddest of all: exile from his loved country, to a country in every sense

inhospitable and abhorrent to him. While the "gloomy night is gathering fast," in mental storm and solitude, as well as in physical, he sings his wild farewell to Scotland:

> "Farewell, my friends, farewell, my foes!
> My peace with these, my love with those:
> The bursting tears my heart declare;
> Adieu, my native banks of Ayr!"

Light breaks suddenly in on him in floods; but still a false transitory light, and no real sunshine. He is invited to Edinburgh; hastens thither with anticipating heart; is welcomed as in triumph, and with universal blandishment and acclamation; whatever is wisest, whatever is greatest, or loveliest there, gathers round him, to gaze on his face, to show him honor, sympathy, affection. Burns's appearance among the sages and nobles of Edinburgh, must be regarded as one of the most singular phenomena in modern Literature; almost like the appearance of some Napoleon among the crowned sovereigns of modern Politics. For it is nowise as a "mockery king," set there by favor, transiently, and for a purpose, that he will let himself be treated; still less is he a mad Rienzi, whose sudden elevation turns his too weak head; but he stands there on his own basis; cool, unastonished, holding his equal rank from Nature herself; putting forth no claim which there is not strength *in* him, as well as about him, to vindicate. Mr. Lockhart has some forcible observations on this point:

"It needs no effort of imagination," says he, "to conceive what the sensations of an isolated set of scholars (almost all either clergymen or professors) must have been, in the presence of this big-boned, black-browed, brawny stranger, with his great flashing eyes, who, having forced his way among them from the plough-tail, at a single stride, manifested in the whole strain of his bearing and conversation, a most thorough conviction, that in the society of the most eminent men of his nation, he was exactly where he was entitled to be; hardly deigned to flatter them by exhibiting even an occasional symptom of being flattered by their notice; by turns calmly measured himself against the most cultivated understandings of his time in discussion; overpowered the *bon mots* of the most celebrated convivialists by broad floods of merriment, impregnated with all the burning life of genius; astounded bosoms habitually enveloped in the thrice-piled folds of social reserve, by compelling them to tremble, — nay, to tremble visibly, — beneath the fearless touch of natural pathos; and all this without indicating the smallest willingness to be ranked among those professional ministers of excitement, who are content to be paid in money and smiles for doing what the spectators and auditors would be ashamed of doing in their own persons, even if they had the power of doing it; and last, and probably worst of all, who was known to be in the habit of enlivening societies which they would have scorned to approach, still more frequently than their own, with eloquence no

less magnificent; with wit in all likelihood still more daring; often enough as the superiors whom he fronted without alarm might have guessed from the beginning, and had, ere long, no occasion to guess, with wit pointed at themselves."

The farther we remove from this scene, the more singular will it seem to us: details of the exterior aspect of it are already full of interest. Most readers recollect Mr. Walker's personal interviews with Burns as among the best passages of his Narrative; a time will come when this reminiscence of Sir Walter Scott's, slight though it is, will also be precious.

"As for Burns," writes Sir Walter, "I may truly say *Virgilium vidi tantum.* I was a lad of fifteen in 1786–7, when he came first to Edinburgh, but had sense and feeling enough to be much interested in his poetry, and would have given the world to know him: but I had very little acquaintance with any literary people; and still less with the gentry of the west country, the two sets that he most frequented. Mr. Thomas Grierson was at that time a clerk of my father's. He knew Burns, and promised to ask him to his lodgings to dinner, but had no opportunity to keep his word; otherwise I might have seen more of this distinguished man. As it was, I saw him one day at the late venerable Professor Ferguson's, where there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among whom I remember the celebrated Mr. Dugald Stewart. Of course, we youngsters sat silent, looked and listened. The only thing I re-

member, which was remarkable in Burns's manner, was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one side, — on the other, his widow, with a child in her arms. These lines were written beneath:

'Cold on Canadian hills, or Minden's plain,
Perhaps that mother wept her soldier slain:
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops mingling with the milk he drew;
Gave the sad presage of his future years,
The child of misery baptized in tears.'

"Burns seemed much affected by the print, or rather by the ideas which it suggested to his mind. He actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were, and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's, called by the unpromising title of *The Justice of Peace.* I whispered my information to a friend present, he mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word, which, though of mere civility, I then received and still recollect with very great pleasure.

"His person was strong and robust; his manners rustic, not clownish; a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity, which received part of its effect perhaps from one's knowledge of his extraordinary talents. His features are represented in Mr. Nasmyth's picture: but to me it conveys the idea that they are diminished, as if

seen in perspective. I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits. I should have taken the poet, had I not known what he was, for a very sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch school, i.e. none of your modern agriculturists who keep laborers for their drudgery, but the *douce gudeman* who held his own plough. There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large, and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time. His conversation expressed perfect self-confidence, without the slightest presumption. Among the men who were the most learned of their time and country, he expressed himself with perfect firmness, but without the least intrusive forwardness; and when he differed in opinion, he did not hesitate to express it firmly, yet at the same time with modesty. I do not remember any part of his conversation distinctly enough to be quoted; nor did I ever see him again, except in the street, where he did not recognize me, as I could not expect he should. He was much caressed in Edinburgh: but (considering what literary emoluments have been since his day) the efforts made for his relief were extremely trifling.

"I remember, on this occasion I mention, I thought Burns's acquaintance with English poetry was rather limited; and also, that having twenty times the abilities

of Allan Ramsay and of Fergusson, he talked of them with too much humility as his models: there was doubtless national predilection in his estimate.

51 "This is all I can tell you about Burns. I have only to add, that his dress corresponded with his manner. He was like a farmer dressed in his best to dine with the laird. I do not speak in *malam partem*, when I say, I never saw a man in company with his superiors in station or information more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment. I was told, but did not observe it, that his address to females was extremely deferential, and always with a turn either to the pathetic or humorous, which engaged their attention particularly. I have heard the late Duchess of Gordon remark this. I do not know any thing I can add to these recollections of forty years since."

52 The conduct of Burns under this dazzling blaze of favor; the calm, unaffected, manly manner, in which he not only bore it, but estimated its value, has justly been regarded as the best proof that could be given of his real vigor and integrity of mind. A little natural vanity, some touches of hypocritical modesty, some glimmerings of affectation, at least some fear of being thought affected, we could have pardoned in almost any man; but no such indication is to be traced here. In his unexampled situation the young peasant is not a moment perplexed; so many strange lights do not confuse him, do not lead him astray. Nevertheless, we cannot but perceive that this winter did him great and

lasting injury. A somewhat clearer knowledge of men's affairs, scarcely of their characters, it did afford him: but a sharper feeling of Fortune's unequal arrangements in their social destiny it also left with him. He had seen the gay and gorgeous arena, in which the powerful are born to play their parts; nay, had himself stood in the midst of it; and he felt more bitterly than ever, that here he was but a looker-on, and had no part or lot in that splendid game. From this time a jealous, indignant fear of social degradation takes possession of him; and perverts, so far as aught could pervert, his private contentment, and his feelings towards his richer fellows. It was clear enough to Burns that he had talent enough to make a fortune, or a hundred fortunes, could he but have rightly willed this; it was clear also that he willed something far different, and therefore could not make one. Unhappy it was that he had not power to choose the one, and reject the other; but must halt for ever between two opinions, two objects; making hampered advancement towards either. But so is it with many men: we "long for the merchandise, yet would fain keep the price;" and so stand chaffering with Fate in vexatious altercation, till the Night come, and our fair is over!

The Edinburgh learned of that period were in general more noted for clearness of head than for warmth of heart: with the exception of the good old Blacklock, whose help was too ineffectual, scarcely one among them seems to have looked at Burns with any true sympathy,

or indeed much otherwise than as at a highly curious *thing*. By the great, also, he is treated in the customary fashion; entertained at their tables, and dismissed: certain modica of pudding and praise are, from time to time, gladly exchanged for the fascination of his presence; which exchange once effected, the bargain is finished, and each party goes his several way. At the end of this strange season, Burns gloomily sums up his gains and losses, and meditates on the chaotic future. In money he is somewhat richer; in fame and the show of happiness, infinitely richer; but in the substance of it, as poor as ever. Nay, poorer, for his heart is now maddened still more with the fever of mere worldly Ambition: and through long years the disease will rack him with unprofitable sufferings, and weaken his strength for all true and nobler aims.

54 What Burns was next to do or avoid; how a man so circumstanced was now to guide himself towards his true advantage, might at this point of time have been a question for the wisest: and it was a question which he was left altogether to answer for himself: of his learned or rich patrons it had not struck any individual to turn a thought on this so trivial matter. Without claiming for Burns the praise of perfect sagacity, we must say, that his Excise and Farm scheme does not seem to us a very unreasonable one; and that we should be at a loss, even now, to suggest one decidedly better. Some of his admirers, indeed, are scandalized at his ever resolving to *gauge;* and would have had him apparently lie still at the

pool, till the spirit of Patronage should stir the waters, and then heal with one plunge all his worldly sorrows! We fear such counsellors knew but little of Burns; and did not consider that happiness might in all cases be cheaply had by waiting for the fulfilment of golden dreams, were it not that in the interim the dreamer must die of hunger. It reflects credit on the manliness and sound sense of Burns, that he felt so early on what ground he was standing; and preferred self-help, on the humblest scale, to dependence and inaction, though with hope of far more splendid possibilities. But even these possibilities were not rejected in his scheme: he might expect, if it chanced that he *had* any friend, to rise, in no long period, into something even like opulence and leisure; while again, if it chanced that he had no friend, he could still live in security; and for the rest, he "did not intend to borrow honor from any profession." We think, then, that his plan was honest and well calculated: all turned on the execution of it. Doubtless it failed; yet not, we believe, from any vice inherent in itself. Nay, after all, it was no failure of external means, but of internal, that overtook Burns. His was no bankruptcy of the purse, but of the soul; to his last day, he owed no man any thing.

Meanwhile he begins well; with two good and wise actions. His donation to his mother, munificent from a man whose income had lately been seven pounds a year, was worthy of him, and not more than worthy. Generous also, and worthy of him, was his treatment of the

woman whose life's welfare now depended on his pleasure. A friendly observer might have hoped serene days for him: his mind is on the true road to peace with itself: what clearness he still wants will be given as he proceeds; for the best teacher of duties, that still lie dim to us, is the Practice of those we see, and have at hand. Had the "patrons of genius," who could give him nothing, but taken nothing from him, at least nothing more! — the wounds of his heart would have healed, vulgar ambition would have died away. Toil and Frugality would have been welcome, since Virtue dwelt with them, and poetry would have shone through them as of old; and in her clear ethereal light, which was his own by birth-right, he might have looked down on his earthly destiny, and all its obstructions, not with patience only, but with love.

But the patrons of genius would not have it so. Picturesque tourists,[1] all manner of fashionable danglers

[1] There is one little sketch by certain "English gentlemen" of this class, which, though adopted in Currie's Narrative, and since then repeated in most others, we have all along felt an invincible disposition to regard as imaginary: "On a rock that projected into the stream they saw a man employed in angling, of a singular appearance. He had a cap made of fox-skin on his head, a loose great-coat fixed round him by a belt, from which depended an enormous Highland broad-sword. It was Burns." Now, we rather think, it was not Burns. For, to say nothing of the fox-skin cap, loose and quite Hibernian watch-coat with the belt, what are we to make of this "enormous Highland broad-sword" depending from him? More especially, as there is no word of parish constables on the outlook to see whether, as Dennis phrases it, he had an eye to his own midriff,

after literature, and, far worse, all manner of convivial Mæcenases, hovered round him in his retreat; and his good as well as his weak qualities secured them influence over him. He was flattered by their notice; and his warm social nature made it impossible for him to shake them off, and hold on his way apart from them. These men, as we believe, were proximately the means of his ruin. Not that they meant him any ill; they only meant themselves a little good; if he suffered harm, let *him* look to it! But they wasted his precious time and his precious talent; they disturbed his composure, broke down his returning habits of temperance and assiduous contented exertion. Their pampering was baneful to him; their cruelty, which soon followed, was equally baneful. The old grudge against Fortune's inequality awoke with new bitterness in their neighborhood, and Burns had no retreat but to the "Rock of Independence," which is but an air-castle, after all, that looks well at a distance, but will screen no one from real wind and wet. Flushed with irregular excitement, exasperated alternately by contempt of others, and contempt of himself, Burns was no longer regaining his peace of mind, but fast losing it for ever. There was a hollowness at the heart of his life, for his conscience did not now approve what he was doing.

Amid the vapors of unwise enjoyment, of bootless

or that of the public! Burns, of all men, had the least tendency to seek for distinction, either in his own eyes, or those of others, by such poor mummeries.

remorse, and angry discontent with Fate, his true load-star, a life of Poetry, with Poverty, nay, with Famine if it must be so, was too often altogether hidden from his eyes. And yet he sailed a sea, where, without some such guide, there was no right steering. Meteors of French Politics rise before him, but these were not *his* stars. An accident this, which hastened, but did not originate, his worst distresses. In the mad contentions of that time, he comes in collision with certain official Superiors; is wounded by them; cruelly lacerated, we should say, could a dead mechanical implement, in any case, be called cruel: and shrinks, in indignant pain, into deeper self-seclusion, into gloomier moodiness than ever. His life has now lost its unity: it is a life of fragments; led with little aim, beyond the melancholy one of securing its own continuance — in fits of wild false joy, when such offered, and of black despondency when they passed away. His character before the world begins to suffer: calumny is busy with him; for a miserable man makes more enemies than friends. Some faults he has fallen into, and a thousand misfortunes; but deep criminality is what he stands accused of, and they that are *not* without sin, cast the first stone at him! For is he not a well-wisher of the French Revolution, a Jacobin, and therefore in that one act guilty of all? These accusations, political and moral, it has since appeared, were false enough; but the world hesitated little to credit them. Nay, his convivial Mæcenases themselves were not the last to do it. There is reason

to believe that, in his later years, the Dumfries Aristocracy had partly withdrawn themselves from Burns, as from a tainted person, no longer worthy of their acquaintance. That painful class, stationed, in all provincial cities, behind the outmost breastwork of Gentility, there to stand siege and do battle against the intrusion of Grocerdom, and Grazierdom, had actually seen dishonor in the society of Burns, and branded him with their veto; had, as we vulgarly say, *cut* him! We find one passage in this work of Mr. Lockhart's, which will not out of our thoughts:

"A gentleman of that country, whose name I have already more than once had occasion to refer to, has often told me that he was seldom more grieved, than when, riding into Dumfries one fine summer evening about this time to attend a country ball, he saw Burns walking alone, on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite side was gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom appeared willing to recognize him. The horseman dismounted, and joined Burns, who, on his proposing to cross the street, said: 'Nay, nay, my young friend, that's all over now;' and quoted, after a pause, some verses of Lady Grizzel Baillie's pathetic ballad:

> 'His bonnet stood ance fu' fair on his brow,
> His auld ane looked better than mony ane's new;
> But now he lets't wear ony way it will hing,
> And casts himsell dowie upon the corn-bing.

O were we young, as we ance hae been,
We sud hae been galloping down on yon green,
And linking it ower the lily-white lea!
And werena my heart light I wad die.'

It was little in Burns's character to let his feelings on certain subjects escape in this fashion. He, immediately after reciting these verses, assumed the sprightliness of his most pleasing manner; and, taking his young friend home with him, entertained him very agreeably till the hour of the ball arrived."

Alas! when we think that Burns now sleeps "where bitter indignation can no longer lacerate his heart,"[1] and that most of these fair dames and frizzled gentlemen already lie at his side, where the breastwork of gentility is quite thrown down, — who would not sigh over the thin delusions and foolish toys that divide heart from heart, and make man unmerciful to his brother!

It was not now to be hoped that the genius of Burns would ever reach maturity, or accomplish aught worthy of itself. His spirit was jarred in its melody; not the soft breath of natural feeling, but the rude hand of Fate, was now sweeping over the strings. And yet what harmony was in him, what music even in his discords! How the wild tones had a charm for the simplest and the wisest; and all men felt and knew that here also was one of the Gifted! "If he entered an inn at mid-

[1] *Ubi sæva indignatio cor ulterius lacerare nequit.* — SWIFT'S EPITAPH.

night, after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from the cellar to the garret; and ere ten minutes had elapsed, the landlord and all his guests were assembled!" Some brief, pure moments of poetic life were yet appointed him, in the composition of his Songs. We can understand how he grasped at this employment; and how, too, he spurned at all other reward for it but what the labor itself brought him. For the soul of Burns, though scathed and marred, was yet living in its full moral strength, though sharply conscious of its errors and abasement: and here, in his destitution and degradation, was one act of seeming nobleness and self-devotedness left even for him to perform. He felt, too, that with all the "thoughtless follies" that had "laid him low," the world was unjust and cruel to him; and he silently appealed to another and calmer time. Not as a hired soldier, but as a patriot, would he strive for the glory of his country; so he cast from him the poor sixpence a-day, and served zealously as a volunteer. Let us not grudge him this last luxury of his existence; let him not have appealed to us in vain! The money was not necessary to him; he struggled through without it; long since, these guineas would have been gone, and now the high-mindedness of refusing them will plead for him in all hearts for ever.

We are here arrived at the crisis of Burns's life; for matters had now taken such a shape with him as could not long continue. If improvement was not to be looked for, Nature could only for a limited time

maintain this dark and maddening warfare against the world and itself. We are not medically informed whether any continuance of years was, at this period, probable for Burns; whether his death is to be looked on as in some sense an accidental event, or only as the natural consequence of the long series of events that had preceded. The latter seems to be the likelier opinion; and yet it is by no means a certain one. At all events, as we have said, *some* change could not be very distant. Three gates of deliverance, it seems to us, were open for Burns: clear poetical activity, madness, or death. The first, with longer life, was still possible, though not probable; for physical causes were beginning to be concerned in it: and yet Burns had an iron resolution; could he but have seen and felt, that not only his highest glory, but his first duty, and the true medicine for all his woes, lay here. The second was still less probable; for his mind was ever among the clearest and firmest. So the milder third gate was opened for him: and he passed, not softly, yet speedily, into that still country, where the hail-storms and fire-showers do not reach, and the heaviest-laden wayfarer at length lays down his load!

62. Contemplating this sad end of Burns, and how he sank unaided by any real help, uncheered by any wise sympathy, generous minds have sometimes figured to themselves, with a reproachful sorrow, that much might have been done for him; that by counsel, true affection, and friendly ministrations, he might have been saved to

himself and the world. We question whether there is not more tenderness of heart than soundness of judgment in these suggestions. It seems dubious to us whether the richest, wisest, most benevolent individual, could have lent Burns any effectual help. Counsel, which seldom profits any one, he did not need; in his understanding, he knew the right from the wrong, as well perhaps as any man ever did; but the persuasion, which would have availed him, lies not so much in the head, as in the heart, where no argument or expostulation could have assisted much to implant it. As to money again, we do not really believe that this was his essential want; or well see how any private man could, even presupposing Burns's consent, have bestowed on him an independent fortune, with much prospect of decisive advantage. It is a mortifying truth, that two men in any rank of society could hardly be found virtuous enough to give money, and to take it, as a necessary gift, without injury to the moral entireness of one or both. But so stands the fact: friendship, in the old heroic sense of that term, no longer exists; except in the cases of kindred or other legal affinity; it is in reality no longer expected, or recognized as a virtue among men. A close observer of manners has pronounced "Patronage," that is, pecuniary or other economic furtherance, to be "twice cursed;" cursing him that gives, and him that takes! And thus, in regard to outward matters also, it has become the rule, as in regard to inward it always was and must be the rule, that no one shall look for

effectual help to another; but that each shall rest contented with what help he can afford himself. Such, we say, is the principle of modern Honor; naturally enough growing out of that sentiment of Pride, which we inculcate and encourage as the basis of our whole social morality. Many a poet has been poorer than Burns; but no one was ever prouder: and we may question, whether, without great precautions, even a pension from Royalty would not have galled and encumbered, more than actually assisted him.

63. Still less, therefore, are we disposed to join with another class of Burns's admirers, who accuse the higher ranks among us of having ruined Burns by their selfish neglect of him. We have already stated our doubts whether direct pecuniary help, had it been offered, would have been accepted, or could have proved very effectual. We shall readily admit, however, that much was to be done for Burns; that many a poisoned arrow might have been warded from his bosom; many an entanglement in his path cut asunder by the hand of the powerful; and light and heat shed on him from high places, would have made his humble atmosphere more genial; and the softest heart then breathing might have lived and died with some fewer pangs. Nay, we shall grant further, and for Burns it is granting much, that with all his pride, he would have thanked, even with exaggerated gratitude, any one who had cordially befriended him: patronage, unless once cursed, needed not to have been twice so. At all events, the poor promotion

he desired in his calling might have been granted: it was his own scheme, therefore likelier than any other to be of service. All this it might have been a luxury, nay, it was a duty, for our nobility to have done. No part of all this, however, did any of them do; or apparently attempt, or wish to do; so much is granted against them. But what then is the amount of their blame? Simply that they were men of the world, and walked by the principles of such men; that they treated Burns, as other nobles and other commoners had done other poets; as the English did Shakspeare; as King Charles and his cavaliers did Butler, as King Philip and his Grandees did Cervantes. Do men gather grapes of thorns? or shall we cut down our thorns for yielding only a *fence*, and haws? How, indeed, could the "nobility and gentry of his native land" hold out any help to this "Scottish Bard, proud of his name and country?" Were the nobility and gentry so much as able rightly to help themselves? Had they not their game to preserve; their borough interests to strengthen; dinners, therefore, of various kinds to eat and give? Were their means more than adequate to all this business, or less than adequate? Less than adequate in general: few of them in reality were richer than Burns; many of them were poorer; for sometimes they had to wring their supplies, as with thumbscrews, from the hard hand; and, in their need of guineas, to forget their duty of mercy; which Burns was never reduced to do. Let us pity and forgive them. The game they preserved and shot, the dinners they ate

and gave, the borough interests they strengthened, the *little* Babylons they severally builded by the glory of their might, are all melted, or melting back into the primeval Chaos, as man's merely selfish endeavors are fated to do: and here was an action extending, in virtue of its worldly influence, we may say, through all time; in virtue of its moral nature, beyond all time, being immortal as the Spirit of Goodness itself; this action was offered them to do, and light was not given them to do it. Let us pity and forgive them. But, better than pity, let us go and *do otherwise*. Human suffering did not end with the life of Burns; neither was the solemn mandate, "Love one another, bear one another's burdens," given to the rich only, but to all men. True, we shall find no Burns to relieve, to assuage by our aid or our pity: but celestial natures, groaning under the fardels of a weary life, we shall still find; and that wretchedness which Fate has rendered *voiceless* and *tuneless*, is not the least wretched, but the most.

Still we do not think that the blame of Burns's failure lies chiefly with the world. The world, it seems to us, treated him with more, rather than with less kindness, than it usually shows to such men. It has ever, we fear, shown but small favor to its Teachers; hunger and nakedness, perils and reviling, the prison, the cross, the poison-chalice, have, in most times and countries, been the market-place it has offered for Wisdom, the welcome with which it has greeted those who have come to enlighten and purify it. Homer and Socrates, and the

Christian Apostles belong to old days; but the world's Martyrology was not completed with these. Roger Bacon and Galileo languish in priestly dungeons, Tasso pines in the cell of a mad-house, Camoens dies begging on the streets of Lisbon. So neglected, so "persecuted they the Prophets," not in Judea only, but in all places where men have been. We reckon that every poet of Burns's order is, or should be, a prophet and teacher to his age; that he has no right therefore to expect great kindness from it, but rather is bound to do it great kindness; that Burns, in particular, experienced fully the usual proportion of the world's goodness; and that the blame of his failure, as we have said, lies not chiefly with the world.

Where then does it lie? We are forced to answer: With himself; it is his inward, not his outward misfortunes, that bring him to the dust. Seldom, indeed, is it otherwise; seldom is a life morally wrecked, but the grand cause lies in some internal mal-arrangement, some want less of good fortune than of good guidance. Nature fashions no creature without implanting in it the strength needful for its action and duration; least of all does she so neglect her masterpiece and darling, the poetic soul. Neither can we believe that it is in the power of *any* external circumstances utterly to ruin the mind of a man; nay, if proper wisdom be given him, even so much as to affect its essential health and beauty. The sternest sum-total of all worldly misfortunes is Death; nothing more *can* lie in the cup of human woe:

yet many men, in all ages, have triumphed over Death, and led it captive; converting its physical victory into a moral victory for themselves, into a seal and immortal consecration for all that their past life had achieved. What has been done, may be done again; nay, it is but the degree and not the kind of such heroism that differs in different seasons; for without some portion of this spirit, not of boisterous daring, but of silent fearlessness, of Self-denial, in all its forms, no good man, in any scene or time, has ever attained to be good.

16. We have already stated the error of Burns; and mourned over it, rather than blamed it. It was the want of unity in his purposes, of consistency in his aims; the hapless attempt to mingle in friendly union the common spirit of the world with the spirit of poetry, which is of a far different and altogether irreconcilable nature. Burns was nothing wholly, and Burns could be nothing, no man formed as he was can be any thing, by halves. The heart, not of a mere hot-blooded, popular verse-monger, or poetical *Restaurateur*, but of a true Poet and Singer, worthy of the old religious heroic times, had been given him: and he fell in an age, not of heroism and religion, but of scepticism, selfishness, and triviality, when true Nobleness was little understood, and its place supplied by a hollow, dissocial, altogether barren and unfruitful principle of Pride. The influences of that age, his open, kind, susceptible nature, to say nothing of his highly untoward situation, made it more than usually difficult for him to repel or resist; the better spirit

that was within him ever sternly demanded its rights, its supremacy; he spent his life in endeavoring to reconcile these two; and lost it, as he must have lost it, without reconciling them here.

Burns was born poor; and born also to continue poor, for he would not endeavor to be otherwise: this it had been well could he have once for all admitted, and considered as finally settled. He was poor, truly; but hundreds even of his own class and order of minds have been poorer, yet have suffered nothing deadly from it: nay, his own father had a far sorer battle with ungrateful destiny than his was; and he did not yield to it, but died courageously warring, and to all moral intents prevailing, against it. True, Burns had little means, had even little time for poetry, his only real pursuit and vocation; but so much the more precious was what little he had. In all these external respects his case was hard; but very far from the hardest. Poverty, incessant drudgery, and much worse evils, it has often been the lot of poets and wise men to strive with, and their glory to conquer. Locke was banished as a traitor; and wrote his *Essay on the Human Understanding*, sheltering himself in a Dutch garret. Was Milton rich or at his ease, when he composed *Paradise Lost?* Not only low, but fallen from a height; not only poor, but impoverished; in darkness and with dangers compassed round, he sang his immortal song, and found fit audience, though few. Did not Cervantes finish his work, a maimed soldier, and in prison? Nay, was not the *Araucana*, which

Spain acknowledges as its Epic, written without even the aid of paper; on scraps of leather, as the stout fighter and voyager snatched any moment from that wild warfare?

68. And what then had these men, which Burns wanted? Two things; both which, it seems to us, are indispensable for such men. They had a true, religious principle of morals; and a single not a double aim in their activity. They were not self-seekers and self-worshippers; but seekers and worshippers of something far better than Self. Not personal enjoyment was their object; but a high, heroic idea of Religion, of Patriotism, of heavenly Wisdom, in one or the other form, ever hovered before them; in which cause, they neither shrunk from suffering, nor called on the earth to witness it as something wonderful; but patiently endured, counting it blessedness enough so to spend and be spent. Thus the "golden calf of Self-love," however curiously carved, was not their Deity; but the Invisible Goodness, which alone is man's reasonable service. This feeling was as a celestial fountain, whose streams refreshed into gladness and beauty all the provinces of their otherwise too desolate existence. In a word, they willed one thing, to which all other things were subordinated, and made subservient; and therefore they accomplished it. The wedge will rend rocks; but its edge must be sharp and single: if it be double, the wedge is bruised in pieces and will rend nothing.

69. Part of this superiority these men owed to their age;

in which heroism and devotedness were still practised, or at least not yet disbelieved in; but much of it likewise they owed to themselves. With Burns again it was different. His morality, in most of its practical points, is that of a mere worldly man; enjoyment, in a finer or a coarser shape, is the only thing he longs and strives for. A noble instinct sometimes raises him above this; but an instinct only, and acting only for moments. He has no Religion; in the shallow age, where his days were cast, Religion was not discriminated from the New and Old Light *forms* of Religion; and was, with these, becoming obsolete in the minds of men. His heart, indeed, is alive with a trembling adoration, but there is no temple in his understanding. He lives in darkness and in the shadow of doubt. His religion, at best, is an anxious wish; like that of Rabelais, "a great Perhaps."

He loved Poetry warmly, and in his heart; could he but have loved it purely, and with his whole undivided heart, it had been well. For Poetry, as Burns could have followed it, is but another form of Wisdom, of Religion; is itself Wisdom and Religion. But this also was denied him. His poetry is a stray vagrant gleam, which will not be extinguished within him, yet rises not to be the true light of his path, but is often a wildfire that misleads him. It was not necessary for Burns to be rich, to be, or to seem, "independent;" but *it was* necessary for him to be at one with his own heart; to place what was highest in his nature, highest

also in his life; "to seek within himself for that consistency and sequence, which external events would for ever refuse him." He was born a poet; poetry was the celestial element of his being, and should have been the soul of his whole endeavors. Lifted into that serene ether, whither he had wings given him to mount, he would have needed no other elevation: Poverty, neglect, and all evil, save the desecration of himself and his Art, were a small matter to him; the pride and the passions of the world lay far beneath his feet; and he looked down alike on noble and slave, on prince and beggar, and all that wore the stamp of man, with clear recognition, with brotherly affection, with sympathy, with pity. Nay, we question whether for his culture as a Poet, poverty, and much suffering for a season, were not absolutely advantageous. Great men, in looking back over their lives, have testified to that effect. "I would not for much," says Jean Paul, "that I had been born richer." And yet Paul's birth was poor enough; for, in another place, he adds; "The prisoner's allowance is bread and water; and I had often only the latter." But the gold that is refined in the hottest furnace comes out the purest; or, as he has himself expressed it, "the canary-bird sings sweeter the longer it has been trained in a darkened cage."

A man like Burns might have divided his hours between poetry and virtuous industry; industry which all true feeling sanctions, nay prescribes, and which has a beauty, for that cause, beyond the pomp of thrones:

but to divide his hours between poetry and rich men's banquets, was an ill-starred and inauspicious attempt. How could he be at ease at such banquets? What had he to do there, mingling his music with the coarse roar of altogether earthly voices, and brightening the thick smoke of intoxication with fire lent him from heaven? Was it his aim to *enjoy* life? To-morrow he must go drudge as an Exciseman! We wonder not that Burns became moody, indignant, and at times an offender against certain rules of society; but rather that he did not grow utterly frantic, and run *a-muck* against them all. How could a man, so falsely placed, by his own or others' fault, ever know contentment or peaceable diligence for an hour? What he did, under such perverse guidance, and what he forbore to do, alike fill us with astonishment at the natural strength and worth of his character.

Doubtless there was a remedy for this perverseness: but not in others; only in himself; least of all in simple increase of wealth and worldly "respectability." We hope we have now heard enough about the efficacy of wealth for poetry, and to make poets happy. Nay, have we not seen another instance of it in these very days? Byron, a man of endowment considerably less ethereal than that of Burns, is born in the rank not of a Scottish ploughman, but of an English peer: the highest worldly honors, the fairest worldly career, are his by inheritance: the richest harvest of fame he soon reaps, in another province, by his own hand. And what does

all this avail him? Is he happy, is he good, is he true? Alas, he has a poet's soul, and strives towards the Infinite and the Eternal; and soon feels that all this is but mounting to the house-top to reach the stars! Like Burns, he is only a proud man; might like him have "purchased a pocket-copy of Milton to study the character of Satan;" for Satan also is Byron's grand exemplar, the hero of his poetry, and the model apparently of his conduct. As in Burns's case, too, the celestial element will not mingle with the clay of earth; both poet and man of the world he must not be; vulgar Ambition will not live kindly with poetic Adoration; he *cannot* serve God and Mammon. Byron, like Burns, is not happy; nay, he is the most wretched of all men. His life is falsely arranged: the fire that is in him is not a strong, still, central fire, warming into beauty the products of a world; but it is the mad fire of a volcano; and now, — we look sadly into the ashes of a crater, which ere long, will fill itself with snow!

Byron and Burns were sent forth as missionaries to their generation, to teach it a higher doctrine, a purer truth: they had a message to deliver, which left them no rest till it was accomplished; in dim throes of pain, this divine behest lay smouldering within them; for they knew not what it meant, and felt it only in mysterious anticipation, and they had to die without articulately uttering it. They are in the camp of the Unconverted. Yet not as high messengers of rigorous though benignant truth, but as soft flattering singers, and in pleasant fel-

lowship, will they live there; they are first adulated, then persecuted; they accomplish little for others; they find no peace for themselves, but only death and the peace of the grave. We confess, it is not without a certain mournful awe that we view the fate of these noble souls, so richly gifted, yet ruined to so little purpose with all their gifts. It seems to us there is a stern moral taught in this piece of history, — *twice* told us in our own time! Surely to men of like genius, if there be any such, it carries with it a lesson of deep impressive significance. Surely it would become such a man, furnished for the highest of all enterprises, that of being the Poet of his Age, to consider well what it is that he attempts, and in what spirit he attempts it. For the words of Milton are true in all times, and were never truer than in this: "He, who would write heroic poems, must make his whole life a heroic poem." If he cannot first so make his life, then let him hasten from this arena; for neither its lofty glories, nor its fearful perils, are for him. Let him dwindle into a modish ballad-monger; let him worship and be-sing the idols of the time, and the time will not fail to reward him, — if, indeed, he can endure to live in that capacity! Byron and Burns could not live as idol-priests, but the fire of their own hearts consumed them; and better it was for them that they could not. For it is not in the favor of the great, or of the small, but in a life of truth, and in the inexpugnable citadel of his own soul, that a Byron's or a Burns's strength must lie. Let the great stand aloof

from him, or know how to reverence him. Beautiful is the union of wealth with favor and furtherance for literature; like the costliest flower-jar enclosing the loveliest amaranth. Yet let not the relation be mistaken. A true poet is not one whom they can hire by money or flattery to be a minister of their pleasures, their writer of occasional verses, their purveyor of table-wit; he cannot be their menial, he cannot even be their partisan. At the peril of both parties, let no such union be attempted! Will a Courser of the Sun work softly in the harness of a Drayhorse? His hoofs are of fire, and his path is through the heavens, bringing light to all lands; will he lumber on mud highways, dragging ale for earthly appetites, from door to door?

74 But we must stop short in these considerations, which would lead us to boundless lengths. We had something to say on the public moral character of Burns; but this also we must forbear. We are far from regarding him as guilty before the world, as guiltier than the average; nay, from doubting that he is less guilty than one of ten thousand. Tried at a tribunal far more rigid than that where the *Plebiscita* of common civic reputations are pronounced, he has seemed to us even there less worthy of blame than of pity and wonder. But the world is habitually unjust in its judgments of such men; unjust on many grounds, of which this one may be stated as the substance: it decides, like a court of law, by dead statutes; and not positively but negatively; less on what is done right, than on what is, or is not, done wrong.

Not the few inches of deflection from the mathematical orbit, which are so easily measured, but the *ratio* of these to the whole diameter, constitutes the real aberration. This orbit may be a planet's, its diameter the breadth of the solar system; or it may be a city hippodrome; nay, the circle of a ginhorse, its diameter a score of feet or paces. But the inches of deflection only are measured; and it is assumed that the diameter of the ginhorse, and that of the planet, will yield the same ratio when compared with them. Here lies the root of many a blind, cruel condemnation of Burnses, Swifts, Rousseaus, which one never listens to with approval. Granted, the ship comes into the harbor with shrouds and tackle damaged; and the pilot is therefore blameworthy; for he has not been all-wise and all-powerful; but to know *how* blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the Globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs.

15. With our readers in general, with men of right feeling anywhere, we are not required to plead for Burns. In pitying admiration, he lies enshrined in all our hearts, in a far nobler mausoleum than that one of marble; neither will his Works, even as they are, pass away from the memory of man. While the Shakspeares and Miltons roll on like mighty rivers through the country of Thought, bearing fleets of traffickers and assiduous pearl-fishers on their waves; this little Valclusa Fountain will also arrest our eye: for this also is of Nature's own and most cunning workmanship, bursts from the

depths of the earth, with a full gushing current, into the light of day; and often will the traveller turn aside to drink of its clear waters, and muse among its rocks and pines!

NOTES.

To the Student. — The question has been seriously mooted as to whether classic books, edited for the use of students, are too much or too little annotated. To this question, so conditional in character, no satisfactory answer has been given; nor, from the very nature of the question, can there be. Perhaps the nearest approach to an answer may be made by allowing each student to be his own annotator — on somewhat the same principle as "every man his own lawyer." Then, if he thinks a book over-annotated, he may reject the work of other "hands," even when "eminent," and construct his own notes; if under-annotated, he may enlarge the structure reared by another. Now, in a certain sense, and seriously speaking, that is exactly what every critical reader of Carlyle's Essay on Burns may, and ought to be, — his own annotator. For in the Essay are few recondite references to be explained, few obscure allusions to be illumined. The main purpose of the student should be to seize upon the spirit of the Essay, and, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, not let go till a blessing shall have been bestowed. It is *for the student himself* to read the poems which the author of the Essay analyses, — his own consciousness agreeing or differing; for the student, to mark with approving pencil the passages in the Essay that most strongly appeal to him; for the student, to catch the swing and rugged rhythm of Carlyle's English, and note the sturdy vigor of his thought: beyond all, for the student to apprehend the nobleness of sentiment expressed, — remembering also that "the proper office of literature is to take note of sentiment, and the higher the sentiment the higher the literature." By that right standard judged, how lofty is the place of the Essay on Burns! But that sentiment, mark, must be felt by

the student-reader for himself, and not through another. And so, the office of the editor becomes a minor and lowly one, — to point, here and there, to certain beauties or defects; to explain, to compare, to suggest, to bid the reader to consult, — leaving to him the higher task of strengthening and enriching mind and heart by contemplation of noble thoughts. I simply add, that I have not intermeddled with the essayist's punctuation and capitalization, — often peculiar, sometimes puzzling, — but too characteristic of Carlyle to be changed!

A single note must here suffice upon what may be called Carlyle's *Introduction* to the Essay; namely, his brief review of Lockhart's "Life of Robert Burns," — a book which gave impulse to Carlyle's own view of the poet: **The inventor of a spinning-jenny** (p. 5, l. 6). We are not so sure. It is more probable that somebody may rob him of it. But the poet's invention it is hard to steal. He indeed may not get the reward, but neither shall another. **The character of Burns** (p. 18, l. 7). A true prediction; witness the remarkable honors paid to his memory, summer of 1896, one hundred years after his death. **Or visible only by light** (p. 19, l. 5, 6). A fine figure of speech! And to-day the poet, shining by his own clear light, the little men of his time are obscured by very "excess" of his brightness. **This . . . is not painting a portrait** (p. 20, l. 5, 6). But watch with what a masterly hand Carlyle fills in and finishes *his* portrait. **How did the world** (p. 21, l. 23). A very comprehensive series of questions by which to gauge the character and influence of the poet. It will repay the student to learn these questions as a formula for testing the work and worth of writers.

PAGE 22, LINE 15. **Burns first came upon the world.** Let the student read with care this paragraph, descriptive of the sudden flaming and as speedy flickering of the poetic light, and of the re-illumining at the poet's death. Note also the strong way in which Carlyle sets forth the achievements of the poet, when his disadvantages are summed up!

PAGE 24, LINE 2. **a Fergusson or Ramsay.** The former is quite forgotten; the latter, remembered chiefly by an exquisite pastoral poem, dear to every lover of Scottish verse, "The Gentle Shepherd."

P. 24, l. 19, 20. **the genius of Burns was never seen.** The writer of these notes had the temerity once to say at a Burns banquet: The true poet rhymes by inspiration, the false by perspiration. He was sharply criticized by a learned doctor present at the feast; but does not the essayist here prove the truth of the remark, and show Burns to be a true poet?

P. 24, l. 29, p. 25, l. 1. **Criticism . . . a cold business.** Is it not refreshing to read Carlyle's disclaimer,—"not so sure of this"? From this line on through the Essay one feels the throbbings of a sympathetic heart, and is made to see in Burns the man (despite his shortcomings) a greater charm, somehow, than in Burns the poet.

P. 25, l. 23. **But a true poet.** Reader, ask yourself why he is "the most precious gift;" for there are other reasons than those here stated by the essayist. And every reason possible should be urged, in these utilitarian days, to strengthen your own love of true poetry, and to win others to espousement of its claims and charms.

P. 27, l. 28, 29. **the majesty of Poetry and Manhood.** Find illustrations of this double-blossoming truth in the poems of Burns.

P. 29, l. 27. **To try by the strict rules of Art.** What does the reader think?—Was the poet "true to Nature," and does Nature transcend "the strict rules of Art"? Or, would more of Art, less of Nature, have been better?

P. 29, l. 22. **from the palace to the hut.** I once heard a critic say that Burns could never be a world-read poet because his poems were too dialectic. Was he right?

P. 30, l. 1, 2. **his sincerity, his indisputable air of Truth.** Must we not agree with the essayist, that this is the quality in a writer which wins? Name over in your mind various authors, and apply the test.

P. 30, l. 19. **Si vis me flere.** Here the point is, if a poet would win appreciation he must be in earnest. It is related of Carlyle that he said to a young man, listless, who came to him for advice—"Young man if you expect me to be interested, you must be interested yourself."

PAGE 31, LINES 14, 15. **Affectation, the bane of literature, as Cant . . . of morals.** The true Carlylean philosophy of life and letters is here stated in no uncertain words. And is not the great Scotchman right? Apply again the test, as just now you did in the matter of sincerity, and note the results.

P. 33, l. 10. **Certain of his Letters.** There is no truer bit of criticism in all the Essay than this concerning the poet's prose. It may well lead the student to careful consideration of the inherent differences between a perfect style in poetry and in prose. And remember this from Lowell: "Style is the establishment of a perfect mutual understanding between the worker and his material."

P. 34, l. 15. **his choice of subjects.** In this paragraph Carlyle seems to intimate that, to the real poet, one subject is as good as another for poetic treatment. Does the reader agree with him? If not, can you hold with him when he declares that the best subjects are certain happenings "in God's world, and in the heart of man"?

P. 36, l. 9–14. **Tragedy . . . Comedy . . . Laughter . . . Farce.** Note the admirable way in which the essayist sums up the various forms in which the "poet born" may express his thought.

P. 37, l. 4, 5. **as if poetry lay in the tongue, not in the heart.** How keen and subtle the discrimination here! Who has not read of men who failed to become poets because they lacked the poetic heart, though possessing the poetic tongue?

P. 38, l. 6. **Is not every genius an impossibility till he appear?** Let the reader ponder the force of this suggestion, and the sweep and beauty of the illustrative argument by which the essayist answers his own question. And if then he doubt, let him view the poems alluded to, and doubt will surely vanish. 'Twixt the essayist and the poet he may learn what genius is.

P. 38, l. 29, p. 39, l. 1. **a certain rugged sterling worth.** The whole expression is a telling one, and sets forth a remarkable feature of Burns's poems. Follow the essayist as he expatiates upon this quality, and test others of your poetic acquaintance by this standard.

P. 40, l. 7. **This clearness of sight; the impetuous force of his conceptions** (p. 40, l. 23), **vigor of his strictly intellectual perceptions** (p. 41, l. 6). A trio of qualities of utmost importance to a great poet — and yet, as Carlyle sets forth, possessed by few in

the degree in which they belong to Burns. But just what is here meant by "clearness of sight"? "conceptions"? "perceptions"?

PAGE 40, LINES 13, 15. Who was **Homer? Richardson? Defoe?** Is Carlyle's estimate of them just? And is it the same kind of power which enchains us in these three men?

P. 42, l. 16, 17. **the intellectual gift of Burns is fine.** We like this discriminating use of the word "fine." It is not exactly the opposite of the word coarse, but a blending of thoughts so subtle and delicate that they seem to shrink from expression in words — the sensitive flower of the mind.

P. 44, l. 8, 9. **his light . . . his warmth.** The first, as Carlyle so well puts it, "keeness of insight;" the second, "keeness of feeling." In Burns, we are told, both were present; and they made him a greater poet than either quality alone, no matter how great in degree, could possibly have done. The wise head, the loving heart — these are the light and the warmth, to usher in the day of Poetry, and to flood it with sunshine.

P. 46, l. 1, 2. **Dr. Slop; Uncle Toby:** Characters in Sterne's "Tristram Shandy."

P. 46, l. 5, 6. **Scots wha' hae wi' Wallace bled.** Perhaps Carlyle's contention is right — that this "war-ode" is the best ever written. At least it will well repay the student to seek the sources of its undoubted power — especially as the essayist, strangely, has given us no analysis; yes, and to compare with it other battle-cries.

P. 47, l. 5. **at Thebes, and in Pelops' line.** An allusion to the famous lines of Milton in "Il Penseroso:"

> "Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
> In sceptred pall come sweeping by,
> Presenting Thebes or Pelops' line,
> Or the tale of Troy divine."

P. 47, l. 16, 17. **the . . . principle of Love.** The Love of which Carlyle speaks as the "great characteristic of Burns," it would be very difficult perfectly to describe; but does he not at least mean that principle which harbors in its heart no unkind thought of any sentient creature, or even insensate creation, from the hand of God? For this view of Love, read "To a Mouse" and "To a Mountain Daisy." See also how this same regal principle, ever and anon, in

Burns, manifests itself in the shape of Humor (p. 47 l. 19). Here the finely-shaded thought of Carlyle, and the beauty of his diction, light up the whole paragraph, giving us a new thought of the wide difference between caricaturing drollery and the tender sportfulness of real humor, and showing in a few deft words how Burns was a master in both.

PAGE 48, LINES 14, 15. **Tam O'Shanter.** What Carlyle says concerning this poem plainly shows that the critic is not given over to unstinted and unqualified praise of all the poet has written. Yet we venture to predict that whosoever reads "Tam" and "The Jolly Beggars" with critical care, and then, with equal care, Carlyle's comments upon the contrasted poems, will own the critic to be just and right.

P. 48, l. 28. **not the Tieck but the Musäus.** German poets, — the latter, author of some very pleasing and popular tales; the former, the leader of an older romantic and highly imaginative school of poetry.

THE SONGS OF BURNS.

NOTE. — On this part of his subject Carlyle speaks with such rare felicity and potency that we can but urge the reader to follow the essayist closely through every "winding bout," striving to see the things the author sees, and *as* he sees them. Observe that, at once, he pronounces the songs of Burns his "most finished, complete, and truly inspired pieces."

P. 51, l. 2, 3. **genuine poetic feeling, genuine music of heart.** These are great words to conjure with in order to start the true spirit of poetry. Moreover, it is the union of the two in one personality that makes the poet, and especially the lyric poet. Together they form the tongue fitted to "utter the thoughts that arise." Rare blending! May we not say of Burns's Songs, as did Carlyle in his day, "the best that Britain has yet produced"? And yet, I would like to commend to the reader, just here, a modern poet of our own land, who, for heart-music and fine poetic feeling is well-nigh unmatched — Sidney Lanier.

Picture-like phrases: **tawdry, hollow, wine-bred madrigals . . . sentimental sensuality.**

PAGE 51, LINE 19. **Short of the Soul.** How true the intimation, that the songs that come not from the soul can never reach the soul! "Look, then, into thine heart, and write" — says Longfellow. The trouble with many so-called poets is, that they find nothing worthy when they do look, if look they ever do.

P. 51, l. 28-29. **in themselves are music.** A whole essay might be written upon the relation of music to verse — or rather, upon the element of music in verse. (See the "Science of Verse" by Lanier). But here how suggestive of that elemental relationship are the italicized words of Carlyle himself, as he affirms of the story and the feeling of a song that they are not *said* . . . but *sung* . . . in *warblings*. "Such harmony is in immortal souls" — of true lyric poets.

P. 52, l. 9. **drops of songs.** This allusion to Shakespeare's songs is very delicate and true. They are indeed as hard to analyze as raindrops, and they sparkle in the sunlight of the poet's gracious words.

P. 52, l. 13, 14. **force and truth of sentiment and inward meaning.** If the song sung by the poet has a meaning of the soul, and its sentiment has power and truth within it, what a noble harmony there may exist between the inner music of the poet's heart and the outer music of his voice!

P. 52, l. 28, 29. **a tone and words for every mood of man's heart.** This is highest honor of all — to voice the multifarious moods of man. What power is comparable to this? Can the orator attain unto it?

P. 53, l. 5. **our Fletcher's aphorism.** Often quoted, and as often misquoted, there is great suggestiveness in Andrew Fletcher's sentiment. But the student will do well to find out just what it means — to the end that he may answer the shrewd politician, who "allows" that if *he* may make the laws, he'll not care how many songs the rhymesters write!

P. 53, l. 23. **the Literature of Scotland.** There are people today who talk of the insularity of Scottish literature; but it certainly is continent-wide in its reach in comparison with the days before Burns, — and to the poet, Carlyle rightly ascribes the national literary quickening.

PAGE 55, LINE 4. **the natural impetuosity of intellect.** No telling how serviceable such a trait may be, or how destructive, — according as the current of mental activity flows in right channels or not. Yet even if it overflows the banks, now and then, may it not irrigate arid wastes? *Did not Carlyle even so in the impetuous rush of his imperial intellect?*

P. 55, l. 27, 28. **We hope there is a patriotism founded on something better than prejudice.** It is a very manly and noble plea which Carlyle makes for his own country, his "stern Motherland." And although his primary reference seems to be to the desirability of choosing domestic themes, habits, humors, and the like, still he soon drifts into that thought of "the love of country" which he found so marked in Robert Burns's character and life. Now, there are different ways of serving one's country; and the poet's way was voiced by him in the earnest wish —

> "That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
> Some useful plan or book could make,
> Or sing a sang at least."

How grand the consummation of his wish, many a deathless "sang" of his attests. His patriotism inspired his pen, as did that of his great fellow-countryman, Sir Walter Scott, singing —

> "Breathes there the man with soul so dead
> Who never to himself hath said,
> This is my own, my native land!"

THE LIFE OF BURNS

NOTE. — In the pages that follow, the essayist has a hard task to perform, — to be critical, yet kind; not too sharply to accuse, yet by no means wholly to excuse. For he knew, as all the world knows, that the poet's life was far from being beyond reproach. Yet he has succeeded in a remarkable degree in a sketch of the life of Burns, which enchains attention and compels sympathy; and this, too, by no "special pleading," but by frank and manly admissions, and by

an analysis of character and motives most masterful. So we say here, as we said earlier, that it is not so much the mere facts of Burns's life as the interpretation and application of them that should engage the student's thought.

PAGE 57, LINE 30. **the life he willed and was fated to lead.** This is a most comprehensive expression, seemingly chosen with care by the writer to reveal the two great forces that wrought upon the poet's life: *first*, the self-inclination that impelled him on; *second*, the destiny that seemed ever to be tugging at him. Let the student recall Shakespeare, Byron, and other writers, seeking their resemblances, of a moral sort, to Burns.

P. 58, l. 24, 25. **there is but one era in the life of Burns . . . the earliest.** It is to be hoped that the reader will ponder carefully the main thought of this paragraph; namely, that while the intellectual side of the poet's life grew apace, what may be called the prudential side grew slowly — scarce at all; practical wisdom came not with the coming years. But cannot the student, out of his reading, recall other like cases? Keats? Shelley? And why did it so happen?

P. 59, l. 20, 21. **in borrowed colors.** A thought somewhat akin to that put with unapproachable beauty by Wordsworth in "Intimations of Immortality," in the passage beginning, "*Heaven lies about us in our infancy*," and ending, "*The man perceives it die away, and fade into the light of common day.*"

P. 60, l. 7. **the only true happiness of a man.** Carlyle uttered many great truths in his long-time plying of the pen, but not one more practical than this. Would that every young man might be guided by the light of its wisdom! This is the hardest examination question of life to answer — *For what sphere of action am I, by nature and circumstances, best fitted and appointed?* Answer accurately, and act accordingly.

P. 61, l. 20, 21. **Mighty events turn on a straw.** The illustration which Carlyle gives to prove this statement is very interesting. "Had Burns senior prospered, the boy Robert would have received an university training, and have come forth a trained literary workman." But Carlyle's conclusion is startling, — this university man would have "changed the whole course of British literature." Will the student tell us how? — for Carlyle does not. And if so, changed it for gain or loss? In what respects?

PAGE 63, LINES 11, 12. **a kind of mud-bath.** Certainly a strong figure of speech; but not a whit less strong the thought — and, as it seems to us, the truth — which the essayist here evolves. The student might put the question to himself in this wise: Is it needful, in order to attain unto real good in life, first to be practically conversant with all the ill thereof?

P. 64, l. 24. **the religious quarrels of his district.** The writer of these notes recalls this scene: An excited group of men standing in the gloaming before a cathedral in a Scotch city. Drawing near, I could dimly see, and very plainly hear, two men engaged in an animated theological discussion. Just such was the trend of talk in Scotland in Burns's day. But how clearly and forcibly Carlyle sets forth the futility and harm of it all in the case of the poet!

P. 66, l. 16, 17. **Burns's appearance among the sages and nobles of Edinburgh.** What a sight this must have been, — the peasant-poet standing in presence of the learned and titled! It is as fine in its literary suggestiveness as that of Luther at Worms and Paul at Athens in moral significance. His was the coronation of genius, as theirs of character.

P. 71, l. 29, p. 72. l. 1. **this winter did him great and lasting injury.** The poet, as Carlyle says, bore well the "dazzling blaze of favor;" but when the glamorous lights had faded, and the wild winter of excitement had passed, he found himself at odds with his fortune and fate in life. And who cannot see that this condition will "work like madness in the brain," — especially in the sensitive brain and heart of a poet?

P. 74, l. 7, 8. **It reflects credit on the manliness and sound sense of Burns.** This is the note, in spite of mufflings now and then, that rings out longest and clearest in the poet's life. Despite his lowly condition and adverse fortune, his failings, his faults, it is his own cry, — "A man's a man for a' that."

P. 77, l. 5, 6. **Meteors of French Politics.** See any extended life of Burns or edition of his writings to find the strong grip republican notions had upon him.

P. 80, l. 26. **at the crisis of Burns's life.** Notice in this paragraph the "three gates of deliverance" open for the poet. (1) Clear poetical activity. (2) Madness. (3) Death. See also how the

essayist argues in brief each alternative, and engrave upon your memory, O Reader! the beautiful epitaph with which the paragraph closes.

PAGE 81, LINE 24. **Contemplating this sad end of Burns.** Here the argument of Carlyle, to prove that the world could not if it would have abidingly helped the poet, is very close-knit and compact. Friendship, he declares, no longer exists in "the old heroic sense." Patronage is "twice cursed" (what is Dr. Johnson's famous definition of a patron?); modern Honor is a delusion and a mockery — based upon a Pride equally false and mocking; Royalty might well stand as a fit representative of Dr. Johnson's patron. Now, let not the reader think that the essayist is simply carping and captious. How many instances confirm the truth of his words! And surely no censorious critic would cry, as did Carlyle of the neglecters of the poet, "Let us pity and forgive them. But better than pity, let us go and *do otherwise.*"

P. 85, l. 24. **shown but small favor to its Teachers.** A magnificent passage here follows, and well shows the passionateness of Carlyle's nature. There is not an allusion that needs explanation to any intelligent reader; every name he names stands out like a mountain-peak above the low-lying plain of common history. But tell us, *Why* did the world show such small favor to its truly great ones?

P. 86, l. 16. **With himself.** Now follows a very solemn passage — a tender lament of the great Scotch writer over this poetical Absalom. Poverty, he tells us later on (p. 88, l. 18–21), it has often been the glory of poets to conquer; but the requiem must be sung for him who lacks two things, — a true, religious principle of morality, a single aim of activity (p. 89, l. 7, 8).

P. 90, l. 18–22. **He loved Poetry warmly . . . could he but have loved it purely. . . . For Poetry, as Burns could have followed it, is but another form of Wisdom, of Religion.** (P. 91, l. 3.) **He was born a poet.** These various expressions concerning poetry I have brought together, to the intent that in the light of them, and of foregoing pages, the student may inquire anew and for himself into the nature of true poetry, and also into the nature of Robert Burns the poet; into the demands true poetry makes upon its creator; into the way in which the poet met those demands.

A complete inquiry may not be expected; yet I cannot refrain from saying — happy the student who in early years learns something of the divine mission of Poetry!

PAGE 93, LINE 20. **Byron and Burns.** Carlyle, the moralist, shines forth in this comparison in a very strong and clear light. Follow him in the analysis of their longings, their failures, their woes. Then read with him the "stern moral" of the history.

P. 94, l. 13. **the Poet of his Age.** To whomsoever that high honor comes, let him consider what he attempts, and in what spirit, says the essayist. And then he quotes Milton — so masterly, *in spots*, in his prose English. Let us repeat the words here: "He who would write heroic poems must make his whole life a heroic poem." On the other hand, is there a shade of suggestion to modern poet-laureates in Carlyle's advice to let them "*besing* the idols of the time"?

P. 95, l. 10. **Will a Courser of the Sun.** An excellent example of Carlylean diction and imagery.

P. 96, l. 20, 21. **In pitying admiration he lies enshrined in all our hearts.** Reader, as we finish the study of this essay can we not re-echo this sentiment? May we not, also, enjoy "this little Valclusa Fountain"? For, varying the Carlylean figure somewhat, — though in the poetic cup commended to our lips the sweet and the bitter commingle, — may we not still quaff it with pleasant memories of the poet, ROBERT BURNS?

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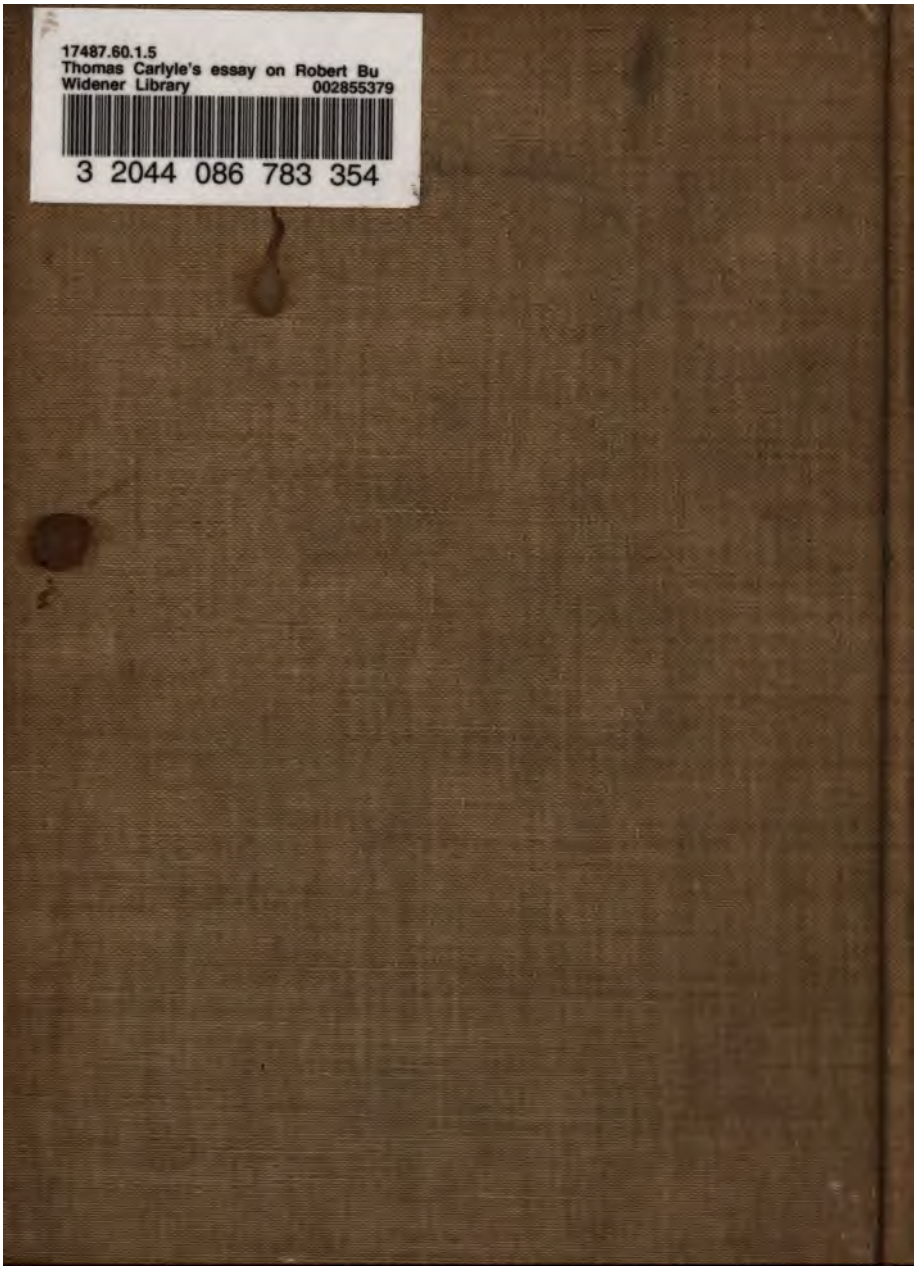
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